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DANGER TRAIL

JILL MARTIN CAUGHT HER BREATH IN DISMAY AS SHE GAZED AT THE RAILHEAD TOWN OF PINE BLUFF IN THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST. WHEN SHE HAD DECIDED, TWO DAYS BEFORE, TO RUN AWAY FROM HER HARSH GUARDIANS IN TORONTO TO JOIN HER UNCLE LARRY IN A URANIUM BOOM TOWN IN THE FAR NORTH, SHE HAD GIVEN LITTLE THOUGHT TO THE DIFFICULTIES SHE MIGHT MEET--OR TO THE FACT THAT WINTER WOULD ALREADY HAVE SEIZED THE NORTHLANDS IN ITS ICY GRIP.

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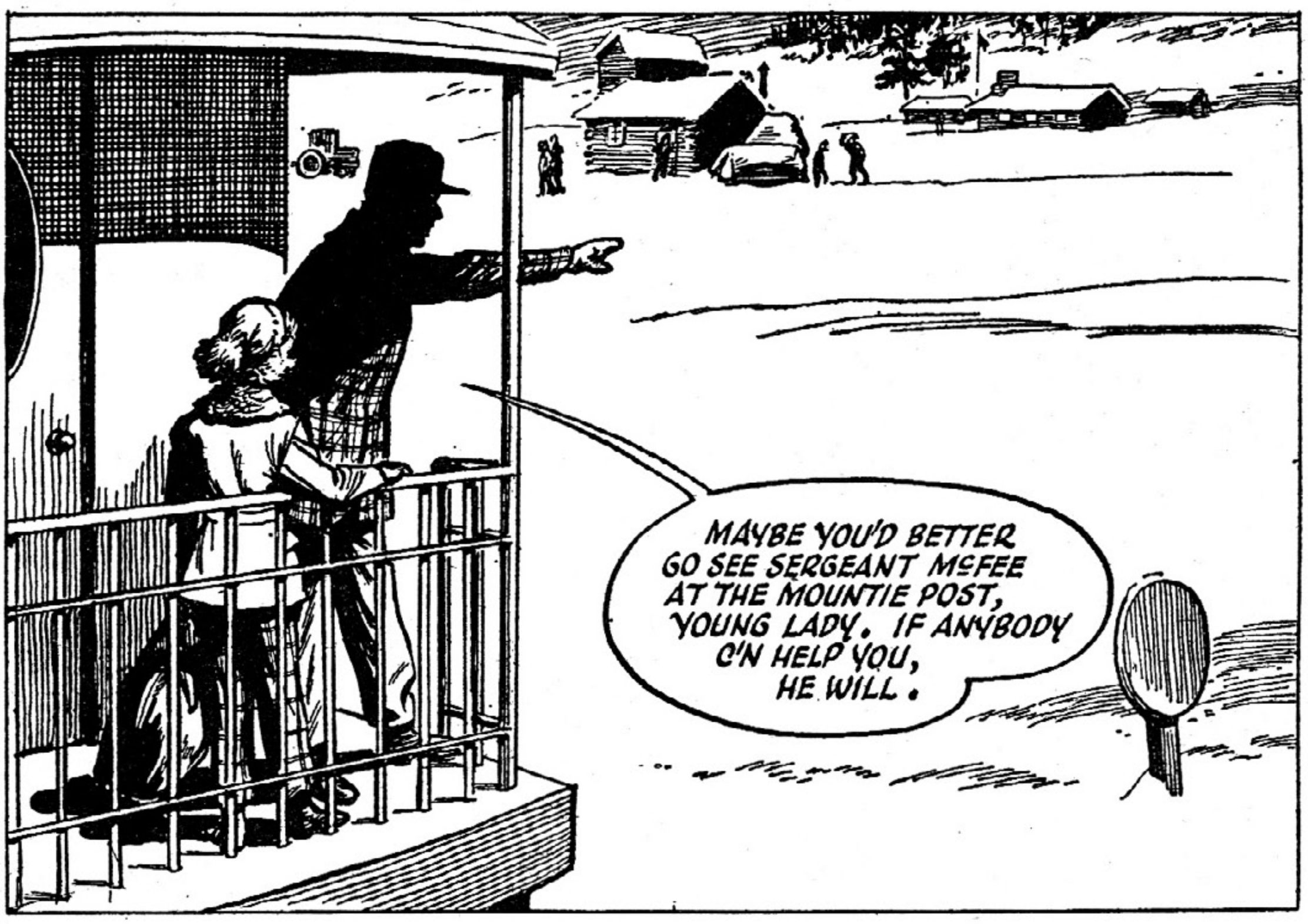
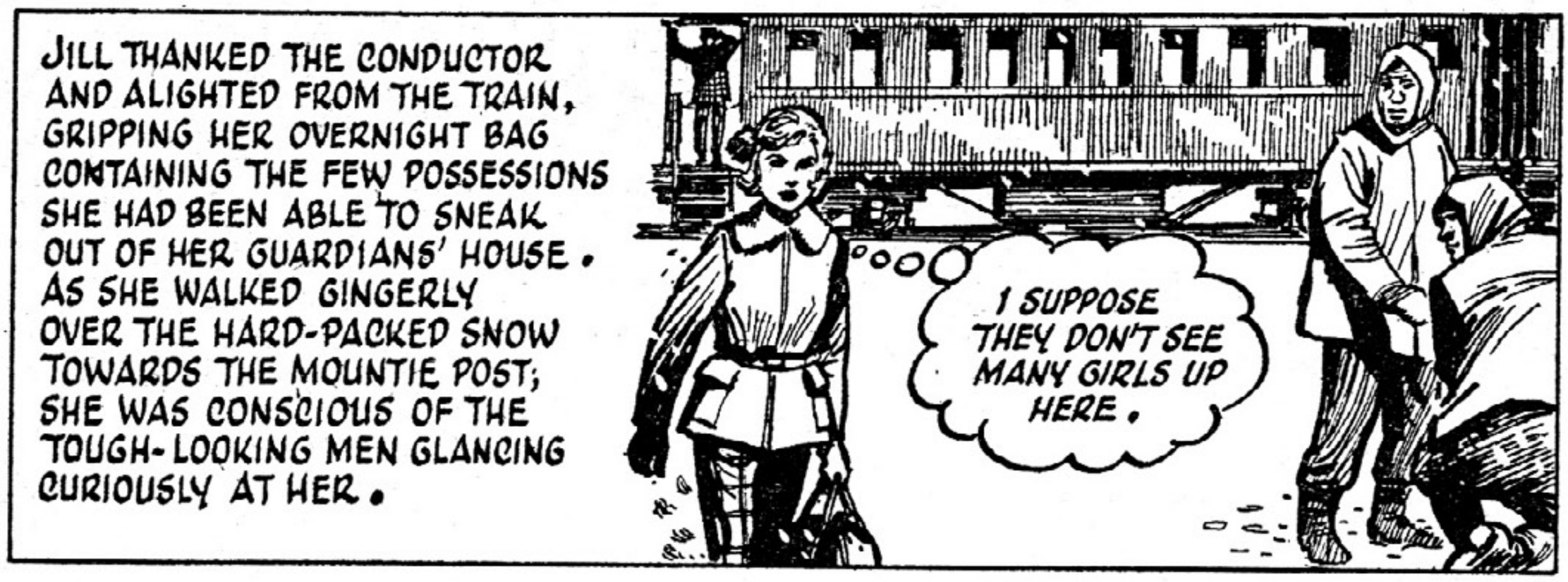
THE KINDLY CONDUCTOR JOINED JILL ON THE PLATFORM.
WELL, THIS IS JOURNEY'S END, YOUNG LADY. ANYONE MEETIN' YOU?
NO, I'M GOING ON TO MOOSE CREEK~~ TO JOIN MY UNCLE.
MOOSE CREEK? WHY, THAT'S ALL OF FIVE HUNDRED MILES FROM HERE~~ WAY ACROSS THE GREAT SLAVE LAKE!
JILL'S HEART SANK.
FIVE HUNDRED MILES? BUT THE BOOKING CLERK IN TORONTO SAID THIS WAS THE NEAREST STATION TO MOOSE CREEK!
SURE, THAT'S TRUE~~ AIN'T NO RAILROADS NORTH OF HERE AT ALL, YOUNG LADY. THIS TIME O' YEAR THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' MUCH OF ANYTHING 'CEPT SNOW AND ICE CLEAR UP TO THE ARCTIC CIRCLE!

BUT THERE MUST BE SOME WAY OF GETTING THERE!
SURE, THERE'S BUSH PLANES NOW AND THEN, BUT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE IN FOR A BLIZZARD MIGHTY SOON AN' PILOTS CAN'T TAKE A CHANCE IN THEM, LASS.


MAYBE YOU'D BETTER GO SEE SERGEANT McFEE AT THE MOUNTIE POST, YOUNG LADY. IF ANYBODY C'N HELP YOU, HE WILL.


JILL THANKED THE CONDUCTOR AND ALIGHTED FROM THE TRAIN, GRIPPING HER OVERNIGHT BAG CONTAINING THE FEW POSSESSIONS SHE HAD BEEN ABLE TO SNEAK OUT OF HER GUARDIANS' HOUSE. AS SHE WALKED GINGERLY OVER THE HARD-PACKED SNOW TOWARDS THE MOUNTIE POST; SHE WAS CONSCIOUS OF THE TOUGH-LOOKING MEN GLANCING CURIOUSLY AT HER.
I SUPPOSE THEY DON'T SEE MANY GIRLS UP HERE.

WHEN JILL RAPPED ON THE HEAVY WOODEN DOOR OF THE MOUNTIE POST A DEEP, PLEASANT VOICE ASKED HER TO COME IN. SHE FOUND A BROAD-SHOULDERED MAN, WITH GREYING HAIR AND A SUN-TANNED FACE, SITTING BEHIND A DESK.
WANTED
HELLO, YOUNG LADY. WHERE DID YOU SPRING FROM?
I CAME IN ON THE TRAIN, SERGEANT. THE CONDUCTOR SAID YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP ME GET TO MOOSE CREEK.

THE SERGEANT'S EYEBROWS SHOT UP.
MOOSE CREEK! WHAT THE---? BUT COME IN AND SHUT THE DOOR. IT'S COLD ENOUGH TO FREEZE THE STOVE!
NOW, LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT, YOUNG LADY. WHY DO YOU WANT TO GET TO MOOSE CREEK?
MY UNCLE'S THERE. LARRY MARTIN. HE'S A MINING ENGINEER.
NOBODY BUT A CRAZY MAN WOULD SEND FOR A GIRL TO JOIN HIM IN A PLACE LIKE MOOSE CREEK AT THIS TIME OF YEAR.
HE DIDN'T SEND FOR ME! I--I RAN AWAY...

IN THE COSY LIVING ROOM BEHIND THE OFFICE, MRS. McFEE MADE JILL TAKE OFF HER HAT AND WINDCHEATER AND GAVE HER COFFEE AND COOKIES STRAIGHT FROM THE OVEN. WITH THE SNOW PATTERING AGAINST THE WINDOW, JILL TOLD HER WHOLE STORY ~~ HOW, SINCE HER PARENTS DIED, SHE HAD LIVED WITH HER UNCLE LARRY, WHOM SHE LOVED. THEN, SOME MONTHS AGO, HER UNCLE WENT NORTH TO A JOB IN MOOSE CREEK, LEAVING HER IN THE CARE OF MR. AND MRS. HARDMAN WHO TURNED OUT TO BE CRUEL~~TREATING HER LIKE A SLAVE. WHEN SHE COULD BEAR IT NO LONGER SHE RAN AWAY, RESOLVED TO JOIN HER UNCLE IN MOOSE CREEK.

WHEN JILL HAD FINISHED, MRS. McFEE WAS THOUGHTFUL FOR A MOMENT. THEN...

A FEW MOMENTS LATER JILL HEARD THE SERGEANT'S VOICE RAISED AS IF HE WERE ARGUING WITH HIS WIFE. THE WOMAN HAD LEFT THE DOOR SLIGHTLY AJAR AND JILL FELT SHE HAD TO KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING. SHE GOT UP AND TIP-TOED TO THE DOOR.
I'M SORRY, MARY. I LIKE THE LOOK OF THE GIRL, BUT IT'S MY DUTY TO INFORM THE TORONTO POLICE!

AND WHAT THEN?
I DON'T KNOW. PROBABLY I'LL HAVE TO SEND HER BACK. THE NORTHLAND IN WINTER IS NO PLACE FOR A GIRL. I CAN'T TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TRYING TO GET HER TO MOOSE CREEK.

WHEN THE SERGEANT'S WIFE CAME BACK, JILL WAS SITTING BY THE FIRE ONCE MORE.
MY HUSBAND'S GOING TO CHECK WITH THE TORONTO POLICE, MY DEAR. BUT DON'T YOU WORRY ~~ YOU CAN SLEEP HERE TILL SOMETHING'S SETTLED. I'LL SHOW YOU TO YOUR ROOM.
THANK YOU, MRS. McFEE. TELL ME, THOUGH, ISN'T THERE ANY WAY OF GETTING TO MOOSE CREEK IF THE PLANES DON'T FLY?

MRS. McFEE TOOK JILL INTO A SMALL, NEATLY FURNISHED BEDROOM OVERLOOKING THE YARD OF THE MOUNTIE POST.
WELL, THERE'S ONLY THE CAT TRAINS.
CAT TRAINS? WHAT ON EARTH ARE THEY?

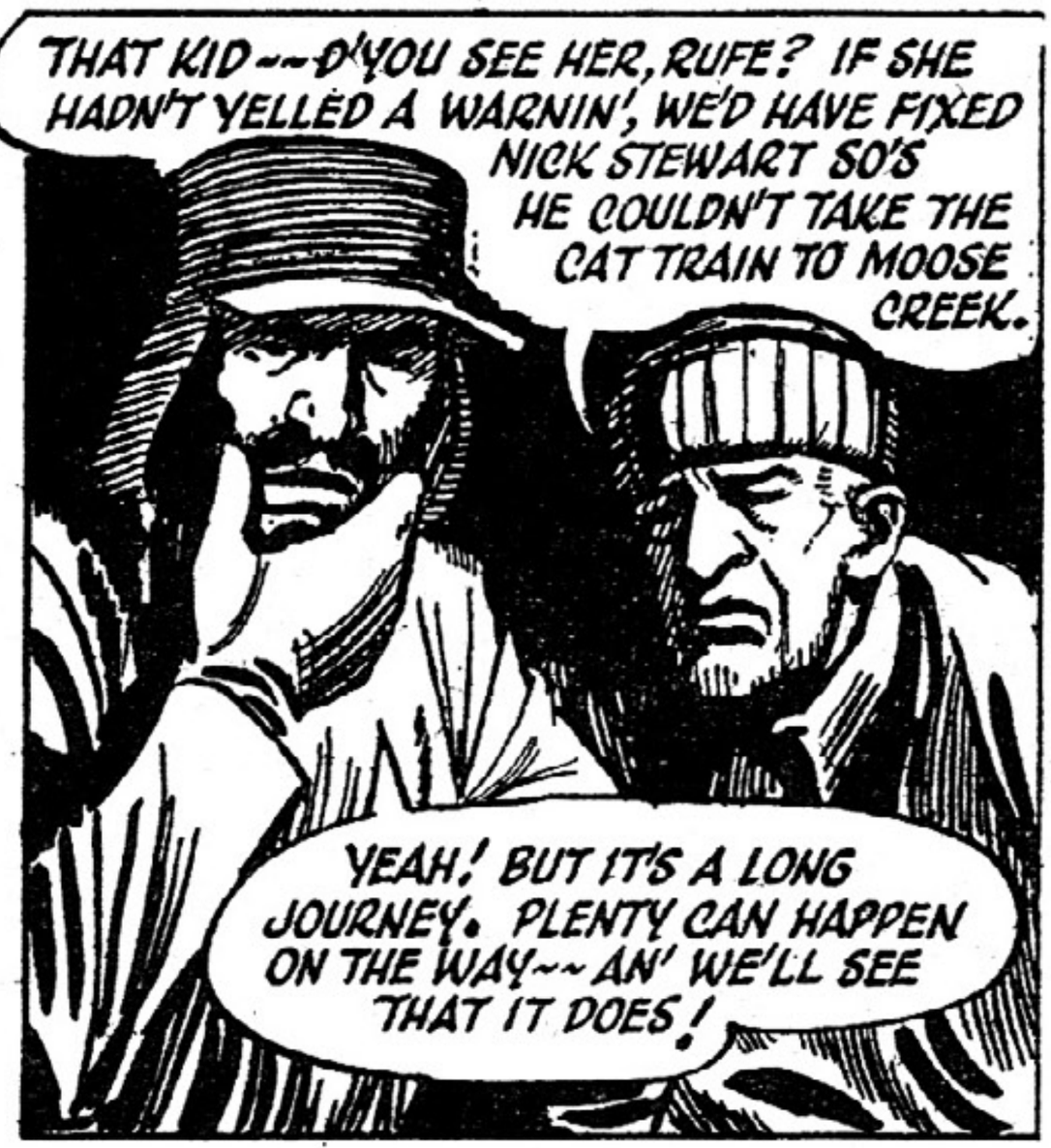
MRS. McFEE LAUGHED AT THE PUZZLED EXPRESSION ON JILL'S FACE.
THEY'RE TRAINS OF BIG SLEDGES DRAWN BY VERY POWERFUL CATERPILLAR TRACTORS, CALLED SNO-CATS. THEY TAKE SUPPLIES TO THE MINING TOWNS AND MILITARY OUTPOSTS IN THE NORTH. NOW, TO BED WITH YOU ~~YOU'RE ABOUT ALL IN!
THAT NIGHT JILL AWOKE AND HEARD VOICES IN THE ROOM ADJOINING HERS.
BUT, JOHN, YOU CAN'T SEND HER BACK TO THOSE HARDMANS!
I'M SORRY, MARY, I DON'T WANT TO, BUT IT'S A MATTER OF DUTY. SHE'LL HAVE TO RETURN ON THE MORNING TRAIN.
THE VOICES FADED ~~ BUT JILL HAD HEARD ENOUGH!
QUICKLY SHE MADE UP HER MIND. SHE SCRAMBLED OUT OF BED AND DRESSED HURRIEDLY. THEN, OPENING THE WINDOW, SHE CLIMBED OUT WITH HER BAG AND MADE HER WAY STEALTHILY ACROSS THE DARK YARD, HER FEET MAKING LITTLE SOUND IN THE SNOW.

AN ALLEY LED TO THE MAIN STREET. JILL STOPPED SUDDENLY AS TWO MEN EMERGED FROM A HOTEL.
SO LONG, MR. CRANFORD. WE'LL BE HITTING THE TRAIL INSIDE AN HOUR.
'BYE, NICK, I'M BANKING ON YOU GETTING THAT CAT TRAIN THROUGH TO MOOSE CREEK ON SCHEDULE.
HE'S GOING TO MOOSE CREEK! I MUST SPEAK TO HIM--ASK HIM TO TAKE ME ALONG.

JILL RAN FORWARD, BUT THEN...
LOOK OUT! BEHIND YOU!

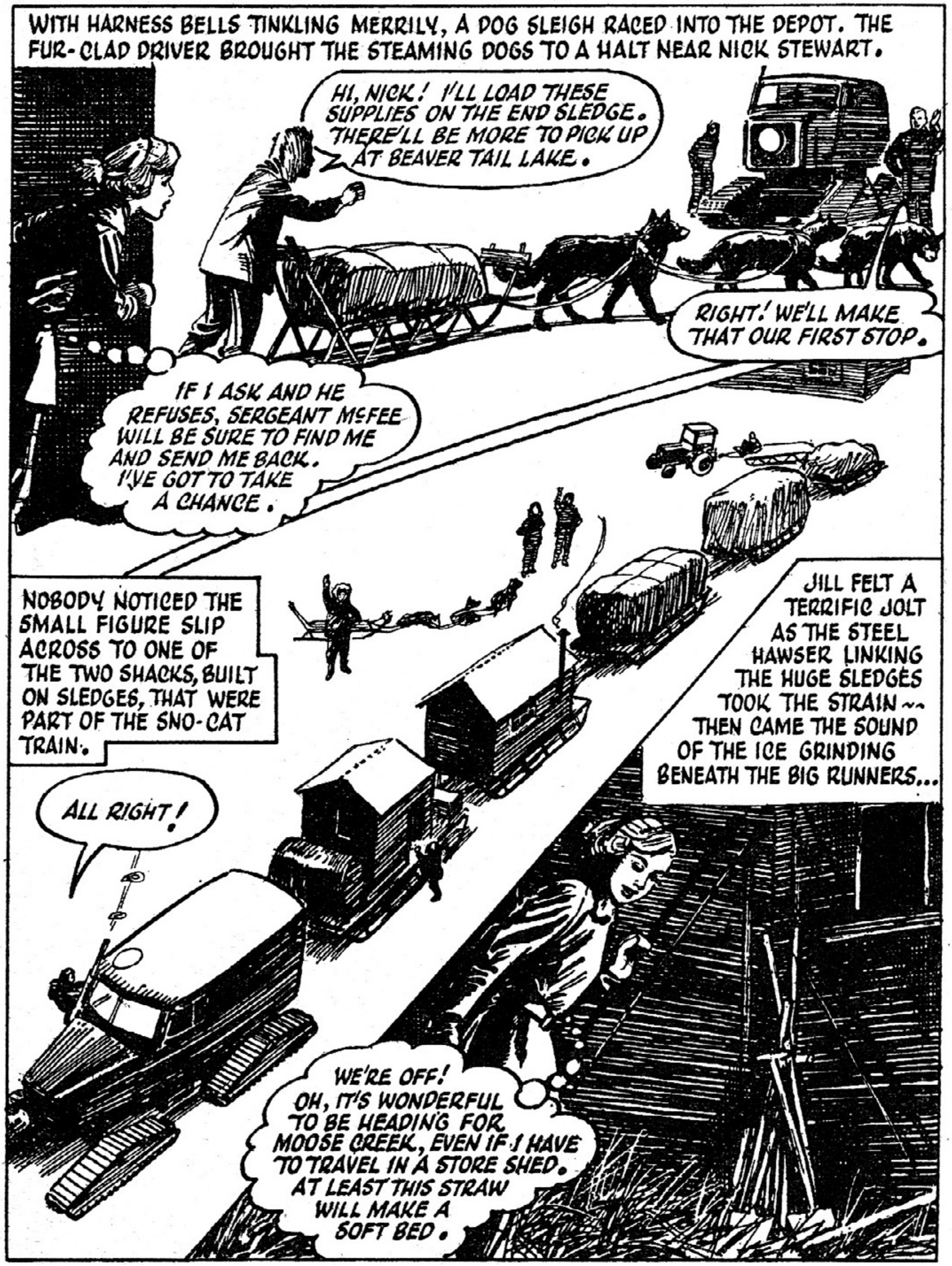
THE WARNING CRY BROUGHT THE MAN CALLED NICK SWINGING ROUND~~ JUST IN TIME.
UGH!
LET'S BEAT IT!

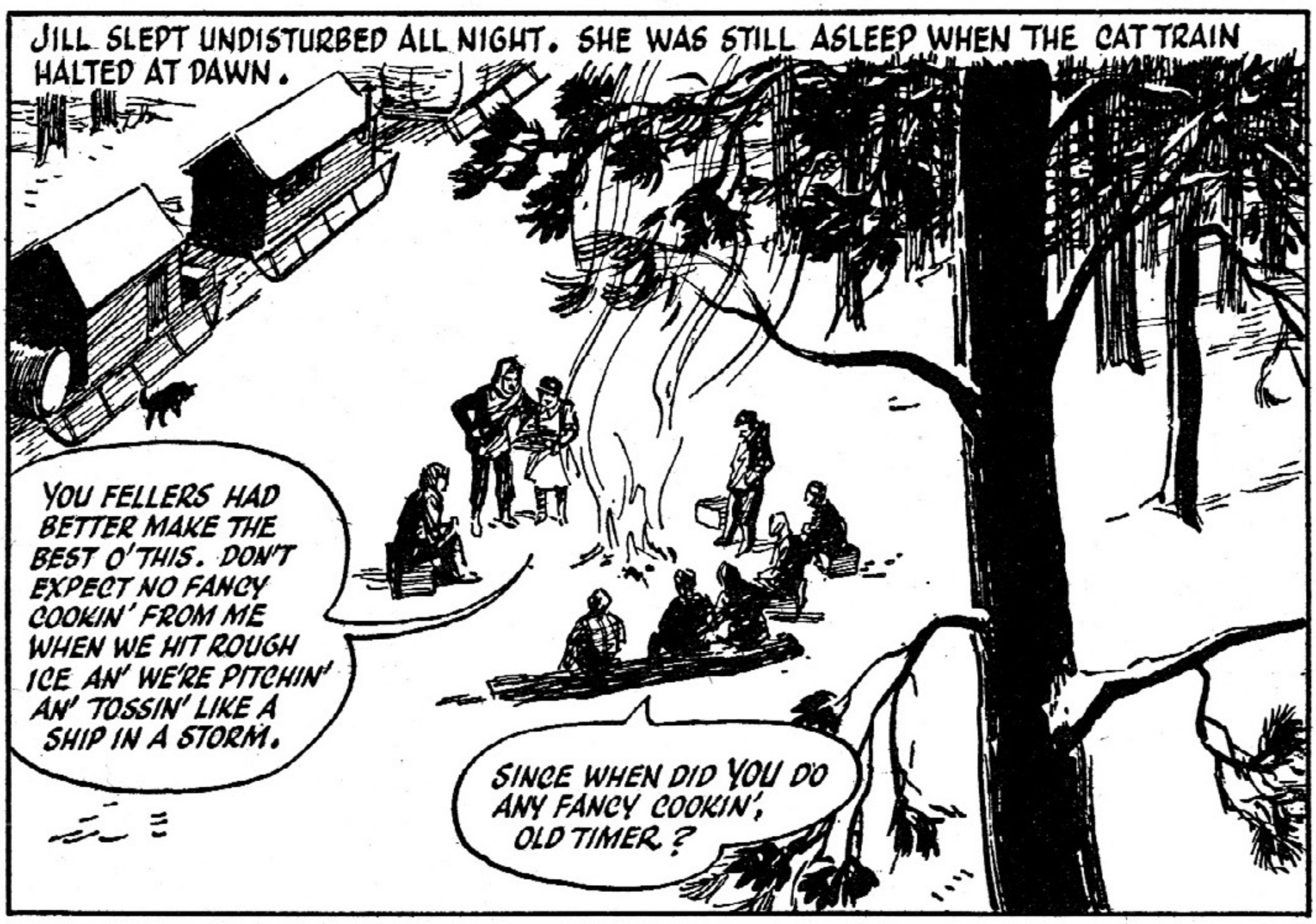
JILL DREW BACK AS THE TWO MEN RUSHED PAST.

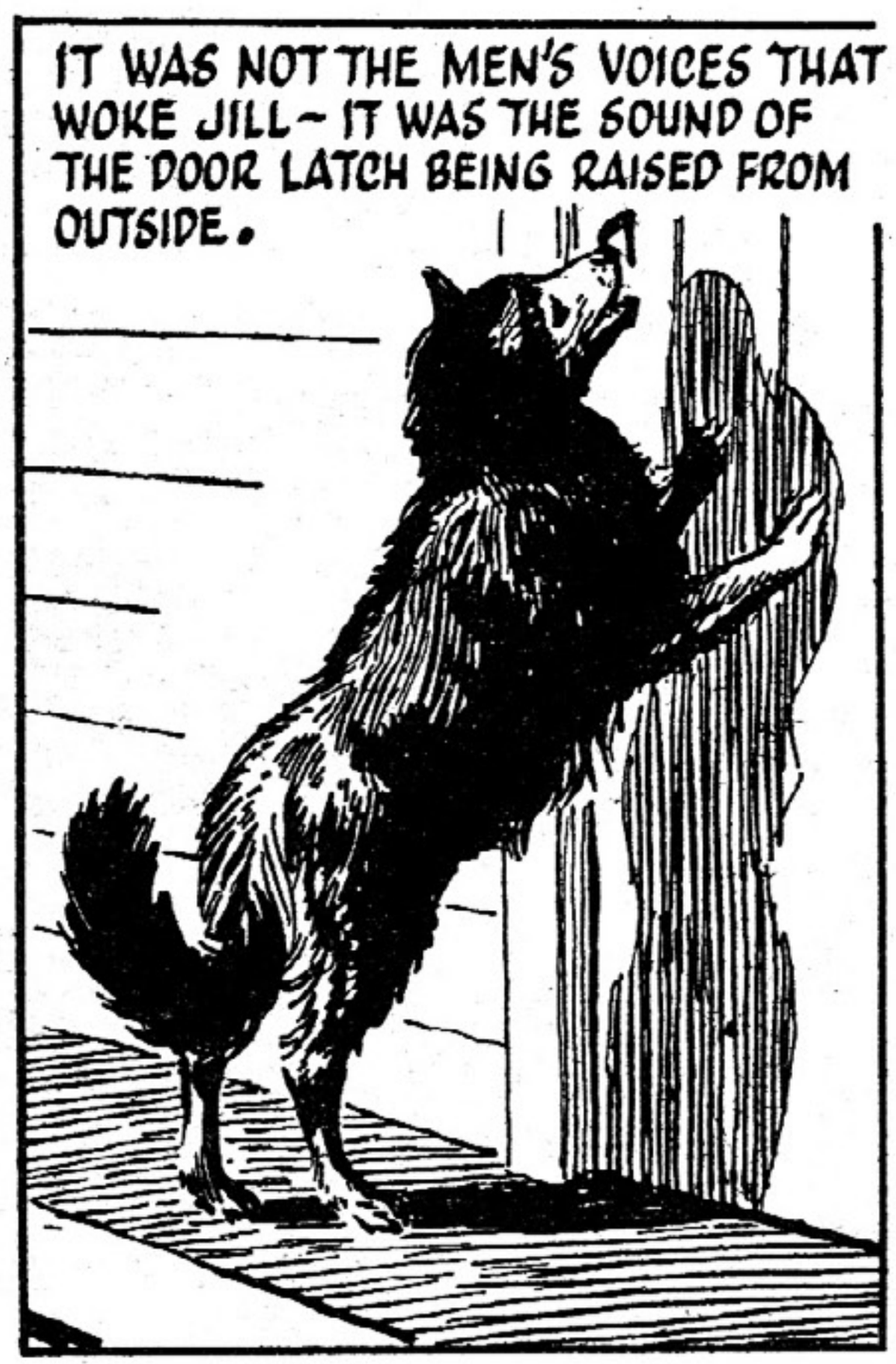

THAT KID--D'YOU SEE HER, RUFE? IF SHE HADN'T YELLED A WARNIN', WE'D HAVE FIXED NICK STEWART SO'S HE COULDN'T TAKE THE CAT TRAIN TO MOOSE CREEK.
YEAH! BUT IT'S A LONG JOURNEY. PLENTY CAN HAPPEN ON THE WAY--AN' WE'LL SEE THAT IT DOES!

THE TWO MEN RAN OFF INTO THE SHADOWS AS A NEWCOMER ARRIVED ON THE SCENE.
SERGEANT McFEE! HE'S COME LOOKING FOR ME--BUT I WON'T GO BACK! I WON'T!

JILL FLED. THE SERGEANT'S CRY ONLY MADE HER RUN FASTER AND FASTER, TILL SHE WAS SCARCELY CONSCIOUS OF WHERE SHE WAS GOING. THEN...
CRANFORD FREIGHT COMPANY
OH, THERE'S THAT MAN AGAIN~~ NICK! THIS MUST BE HIS DEPOT.
NEARLY READY, BOYS? I'LL TAKE THE FIRST SPELL OF DRIVING! WE'LL PULL OUT AS SOON AS BILL LOGAN GETS IN.
HE'S COMIN' IN NOW, NICK!


WITH HARNESS BELLS TINKLING MERRILY, A DOG SLEIGH RACED INTO THE DEPOT. THE FUR-CLAD DRIVER BROUGHT THE STEAMING DOGS TO A HALT NEAR NICK STEWART.
HI, NICK! I'LL LOAD THESE SUPPLIES ON THE END SLEDGE. THERE'LL BE MORE TO PICK UP AT BEAVER TAIL LAKE.
RIGHT! WE'LL MAKE THAT OUR FIRST STOP.
IF I ASK AND HE REFUSES, SERGEANT McFEE WILL BE SURE TO FIND ME AND SEND ME BACK. I'VE GOT TO TAKE A CHANCE.
NOBODY NOTICED THE SMALL FIGURE SLIP ACROSS TO ONE OF THE TWO SHACKS, BUILT ON SLEDGES, THAT WERE PART OF THE SNO-CAT TRAIN.
JILL FELT A TERRIFIC JOLT AS THE STEEL HAWSER LINKING THE HUGE SLEDGES TOOK THE STRAIN -- THEN CAME THE SOUND OF THE ICE GRINDING BENEATH THE BIG RUNNERS...
ALL RIGHT!
WE'RE OFF! OH, IT'S WONDERFUL TO BE HEADING FOR MOOSE CREEK, EVEN IF I HAVE TO TRAVEL IN A STORE SHED. AT LEAST THIS STRAW WILL MAKE A SOFT BED.


JILL SLEPT UNDISTURBED ALL NIGHT. SHE WAS STILL ASLEEP WHEN THE CAT TRAIN HALTED AT DAWN.
YOU FELLERS HAD BETTER MAKE THE BEST O'THIS. DON'T EXPECT NO FANCY COOKIN' FROM ME WHEN WE HIT ROUGH ICE AN' WE'RE PITCHIN' AN' TOSSIN' LIKE A SHIP IN A STORM.
SINCE WHEN DID YOU DO ANY FANCY COOKIN', OLD TIMER?


IT WAS NOT THE MEN'S VOICES THAT WOKE JILL – IT WAS THE SOUND OF THE DOOR LATCH BEING RAISED FROM OUTSIDE.

OH, A DOG! GOOD BOY ~~ QUIET NOW –

TO JILL'S RELIEF, THE DOG PADDED AWAY. BUT A MOMENT LATER...
DURN ME! WHAT'S THAT OLD DOG O' MINE UP TO?

A GAL STOWAWAY! SO THAT'S WHY SKIP PINCHED THAT BANNOCK! NEVER KNOWED HIM STEAL ANYTHIN' BEFORE.
OH!

IT WASN'T THE DOG'S FAULT.' I~I GUESS HE MUST HAVE KNOWN HOW HUNGRY I AM.
SHUCKS, I'M NOT BLAMING THE DOG. GOT A HEART OF GOLD HAS SKIP AN' HE LIKED THE LOOK O' YOU SAME AS I DO. YOU'D BETTER COME ALONG AND SEE NICK STEWART, THE BOSS.

SKIP FOUND HER IN THE STORE SHACK, NICK. HER NAME'S JILL AND SHE STOWED AWAY TO GET TO MOOSE CREEK. GOT AN UNCLE THERE.
STOWAWAY, EH? WHAT D'YOU MEAN BY IT, EH, YOUNGSTER?

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, MR. STEWART, BUT, I JUST HAD TO GET TO MOOSE CREEK SOMEHOW, TO JOIN MY UNCLE, LARRY MARTIN. I HEARD YOU WERE GOING THERE AND ~~
HOLD IT! I'VE HEARD YOUR VOICE BEFORE. WAS IT YOU WHO SHOUTED A WARNING IN PINE BLUFF LAST NIGHT WHEN THOSE TWO ROUGHNECKS TRIED TO COSH ME?
JILL NODDED.
GUESS I OUGHT TO BE THANKING YOU THEN, INSTEAD OF BAWLING YOU OUT. FIGURE YOU'D RECOGNISE THOSE TWO FELLOWS IF YOU EVER SAW THEM AGAIN, JILL?
YES, I'M SURE I WOULD!
SHUCKS, NICK! HOW ABOUT TAKING HER ALONG? I KNOW HER UNCLE, LARRY MARTIN. HE'S AN ENGINEER WITH A BIG URANIUM COMPANY UP IN MOOSE CREEK.
SHE'S SURE EARNED A BREAK, BOSS!

NICK STEWART LOOKED TROUBLED.
I'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU, JILL, BUT IT'S A CONDITION OF MY CONTRACT THAT I CARRY NO PASSENGERS. IF I TOOK YOU ALONG I'D LOSE MY CONTRACT. 'FRAID I'LL HAVE TO DROP YOU OFF AT BEAVER TAIL LAKE TONIGHT.
I QUITE UNDERSTAND— AND AT LEAST I'LL BE PART OF THE WAY THERE.
AT THAT MOMENT A DOG SLEIGH SWISHED INTO THE CLEARING.
TRAIL'S PRETTY GOOD AHEAD, BOSS. PACKED HARD! GEE, THAT GRUB SMELLS MIGHTY TEMPTIN'.
BETTER MAKE THE BEST OF IT, BILL. ANDY'S WARNED US HIS COOKIN'S GONNA GET EVEN WORSE, HA, HA!

TAKE NO NOTICE, BILL. FOLLOW ME AN' I'LL GIVE YOU AN' YOUNG JILL HERE YOUR BREAKFAST IN THE COOKHOUSE SO'S YOU DON'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO THEIR TWADDLE! COME ON, SKIP.

ANDY GLANCED COMICALLY AT SKIP WHO WAS TROTTING ALONG BESIDE JILL.
WELL, I'LL BE HOG-TIED! THERE'S GRATITUDE FOR YOU. DESERTS ME FOR THE FIRST GAL THAT COMES ALONG.
MAYBE HE FIGURES SHE MIGHT BE ABLE TO COOK BETTER'N YOU, ANDY.
HA, HA!

ANDY SLAMMED THE COOKHOUSE DOOR, BUT HIS FACE WAS CREASED IN A GOOD-NATURED SMILE AS HE INTRODUCED BILL LOGAN TO JILL.
KINDA MESSENGER BOY, THAT'S ME!
BILL KEEPS AN EYE ON THE TRAIL AHEAD AN' FETCHES AN' CARRIES MAIL AN' GOODS TO PLACES OFF THE MAIN TRACK SO'S THE CAT TRAIN DOESN'T HAVE TO STOP TOO OFTEN.
BY THE TIME JILL HAD FINISHED HER BREAKFAST, THE CAT TRAIN WAS READY TO START ON ITS LONG DAY'S HAUL TO BEAVER TAIL LAKE.
SKIP'S TOOK SUCH A FANCY TO YOU, LASS, YOU'D BETTER RIDE IN THE COOKHOUSE WITH US. WHEN YOU GET TIRED O' THE SCENERY YOU CAN WATCH ME PEELIN' SPUDS.
I'LL PEEL THEM FOR YOU, ANDY. I MIGHT AS WELL WORK MY PASSAGE~~ EVEN IF IT IS ONLY AS FAR AS BEAVER TAIL LAKE.
WHILE JILL HELPED ANDY WITH HIS CHORES, THE CAT TRAIN CRAWLED STEADILY THROUGH THE FOREST, FOLLOWING THE COURSE OF A FROZEN RIVER.

ANDY TOLD HER OF THE HAZARDS OF THE TRACTOR TRAILS — OF ICE WALLS MILES LONG CAUSING DAYS OF DETOUR, OF GAPING CREVASSES CONCEALED BY SNOW.
THIS OUTFIT'S MAKIN' A SORTA TRIAL RUN TO MOOSE CREEK. IF WE GET THERE ON SCHEDULE, WE'LL LAND A BIG CONTRACT FOR THE WINTER. BUT THERE'S ANOTHER COMPANY AFTER THAT CONTRACT, AN' NICK FIGURES THOSE TWO ROUGHNECKS WHO SET ABOUT HIM WERE IN THE PAY OF THAT COMPANY.
YOU MEAN THEY WERE OUT TO STOP NICK LEADING THE CAT TRAIN TO MOOSE CREEK
AYE, LASS. AN' IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU THEY'D HAVE GOT AWAY WITH IT. NICK'S MIGHTY GRATEFUL AN' I KNOW HE'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU ON TO MOOSE CREEK — BUT YOU HEARD WHAT HE SAID ABOUT THE CONTRACT.
DON'T WORRY, ANDY. I SHALL GET THERE, SOMEHOW!

THEY ARRIVED AT BEAVER TAIL LAKE LATE THAT EVENING.
I'LL FIX YOU UP WITH A ROOM AT MIKE SAMMES' STORE, JILL. HIS WIFE'LL MAKE YOU COMFORTABLE.

ANDY CARRIED JILL'S BAG TO THE WARM, COSY ROOM THE TRADER'S WIFE GAVE HER.
GOODBYE, OLD BOY! THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU.
SHUCKS, I KNOW JEST HOW YOU FEEL. LISTEN, BILL LOGAN'S GONE OFF TO BEAR FALLS ON HIS DOG SLED TO COLLECT SOME CARGO. WE CAN'T START TILL HE GETS BACK IN THE MORNIN', SO HOW ABOUT YOU AN' ME AN' SKIP GOIN' FISHIN' FIRST THING, HUH?
OH, I'D LOVE THAT, ANDY!
SUN-UP FOUND THE THREE OF THEM TRUDGING THROUGH THE SNOW-FESTOONED FOREST.
HOW CAN WE FISH IF THIS LAKE WE'RE GOING TO IS FROZEN, ANDY?
YOU'LL SEE, HONEY. I KNOW A TRICK OR TWO I LEARNT FROM THE INJUNS.

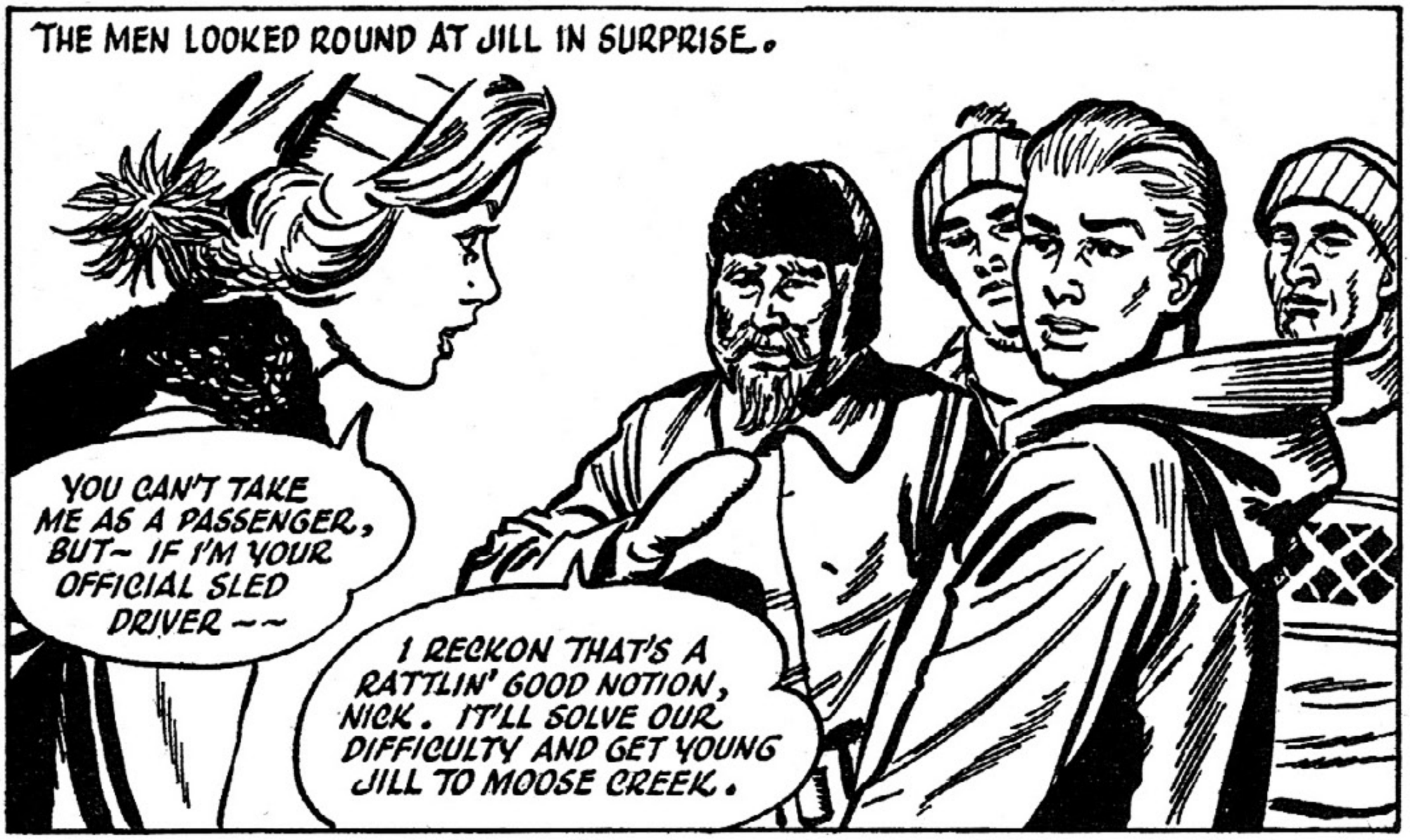
REACHING THE LAKE, ANDY CUT DOWN TWO BIRCH SAPLINGS ABOUT TEN FEET LONG.
YOU HOLD THIS ACROSS THE FRONT OF YOU. IF THE ICE IS WEAK AN' YOU BREAK THROUGH, THIS POLE'LL CATCH ON THE EDGES OF THE HOLE AN' YOU GOT SOMETHIN' TO CLIMB OUT WITH.
SLOWLY THEY VENTURED OUT ON TO THE ICE, ANDY GOING FIRST TO TEST IT.
WAY BACK, I RECKON A LOT OF INJUNS LOST THEIR LIVES BEFORE ONE BRIGHT FELLER THOUGHT THIS UP.

JILL WATCHED, FASCINATED, AS ANDY FIRST CHIPPED A CIRCLE IN THE ICE WITH THE PICK SIDE OF HIS AXE HEAD. AND THEN BEGAN TO CUT THROUGH IT WITH SOMETHING THAT LOOKED LIKE AN OVERSIZE BREAD-KNIFE.
THAT'S A FUNNY KNIFE, ANDY!
MADE IT MESELF FROM A MACHINE-SHOP HACKSAW. AIN'T NOTHIN' TO BEAT IT FOR CUTTIN' BREAD OR MEAT ~~ OR ICE.

SOME MINUTES LATER...
I'VE GOT ONE, ANDY!
AS FINE A TROUT AS EVER I SEE, LASS.

BUT ALL TOO SOON THEY HAD TO START BACK.
THAT WAS WONDERFUL FUN, ANDY.
GUESS YOU'LL DO PLENTY OF FISHIN' WHEN YOU JOIN YOUR UNCLE, AND -- HELLO, WHAT'S SKIP SO EXCITED ABOUT?
SKIP DARTED OFF THROUGH THE TREES, AND WHEN JILL AND ANDY CAME UP WITH HIM...
GLORY BE — IT'S BILL LOGAN.
HAD A BAD SPILL! RECKON MY LEG'S BUSTED.
WE MUST GET HIM DOWN TO THE SETTLEMENT, ANDY. I CAN DRIVE THE SLED.

THEY TOOK BILL LOGAN TO THE STORE, WHERE HIS LEG WAS SET AND HE WAS PUT TO BED.
BILL WILL BE ALL RIGHT, BUT THIS MEANS WE'RE WITHOUT A SLED DRIVER. WE'LL HANG ON HERE TILL TOMORROW, IN CASE SOMEONE TURNS UP~~ THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO PULL OUT.
MR. STEWART, I CAN HANDLE THAT SLED. WHY NOT SIGN ME ON?


THE MEN LOOKED ROUND AT JILL IN SURPRISE.
YOU CAN'T TAKE ME AS A PASSENGER, BUT~ IF I'M YOUR OFFICIAL SLED DRIVER ~~
I RECKON THAT'S A RATTLIN' GOOD NOTION, NICK. IT'LL SOLVE OUR DIFFICULTY AND GET YOUNG JILL TO MOOSE CREEK.

NICK HESITATED.
PLEASE, MR. STEWART! I KNOW I CAN DO IT! I'VE HANDLED A TEAM IN ROUGH COUNTRY BEFORE.
ALL RIGHT, JILL – BUT FOR YOUR OWN SAKE I MUST BE SURE YOU CAN MANAGE THOSE DOGS. I'LL GIVE YOU A TEST IN THE MORNING!

MEANWHILE, ON THE EDGE OF THE SETTLEMENT...
WELL? YOU FIX BILL LOGAN?
SURE! LAID A LOG UNDER THE SNOW. HE CAME DOWN THAT TRAIL AT A LICK—THEN UPSIDAISY! HE BUSTED A LEG. THEY ALL FIGURE IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.
RUFE SCOBIE GRUNTED HIS SATISFACTION.
THEY'RE NOT PULLIN' OUT TILL TOMORROW, SO YOU SEE NICK STEWART IN THE MORNIN' AN' GET HIM TO TAKE YOU ON AS SLED DRIVER. HE DIDN'T GET A GOOD LOOK AT YOU THE OTHER NIGHT SO IT'S SAFE ENOUGH.
OKAY, RUFE!

THAT AFTERNOON, ANDY TOOK JILL ALONG THE LAKE AND MADE HER PRACTISE WITH THE DOG SLEIGH OVER SOME VERY ROUGH GROUND.
SHE'S GOT TO DO BETTER TO GET THAT JOB. WHITEY'S THE TROUBLE, BUT I RECKON I CAN FIX THAT.
MUSH! STEADY, WHITEY! WHITEY!
ANDY TOOK WHITEY OUT OF THE LEAD TRACES AND PUT SKIP IN HIS PLACE. AND ON THE NEXT RUN...
IT'S MUCH BETTER WITH SKIP, ANDY. HE KNOWS HIS JOB!
SLED DOG FOR YEARS. WITH A MOUNTIE ONCE. RECKON YOU'LL DO, HONEY, IF YOU C'N DRIVE LIKE THAT FOR NICK.

THE NEXT MORNING EVERYBODY IN THE LITTLE SETTLEMENT TURNED OUT TO WATCH THE TRIAL.
YOU LET HER DOWN, OLD FELLER, AN' I'LL SELL YOU FOR FISH-BAIT!
THE ROUTE'S MARKED WITH DYE, JILL. YOU CAN'T MISS IT. GOOD LUCK!
THANK YOU, MR. STEWART.

JUST AS JILL WAS ABOUT TO START OFF...
WHO THE HECK'S THIS?
THAT'S A MOUNTIE OUTFIT. TELL IT A MILE AWAY.

JILL'S HEART THUMPED AS THE NEWCOMER CAME UP.
IT'S SERGEANT McFEE! HE'S COME TO TAKE ME BACK!

HELLO, YOUNG LADY. YOU'VE GIVEN ME A PRETTY CHASE!

WHAT'S THE MATTER SERGEANT? WHY DO YOU WANT HER?
SHE'S RUN AWAY FROM HER FOLK IN TORONTO. THEY WANT HER SENT BACK!
THEY'RE NOT MY FOLK! THEY JUST PROMISED MY UNCLE LARRY THEY'D LOOK AFTER ME WHILE HE WAS UP NORTH. BUT THEY WERE SO HORRID TO ME THAT I RAN AWAY.

ANDY PUSHED FORWARD.
LOOK HERE, McFEE! I'D RATHER BELIEVE THIS KID THAN THOSE FOLK BACK IN TORONTO. SHE'S OKAY! YOU C'N RADIO TORONTO AN' TELL 'EM WE'LL SEE SHE GETS TO HER UNCLE LARRY.
WE WILL IF SHE PASSES THIS TEST, ANDY. OTHERWISE...

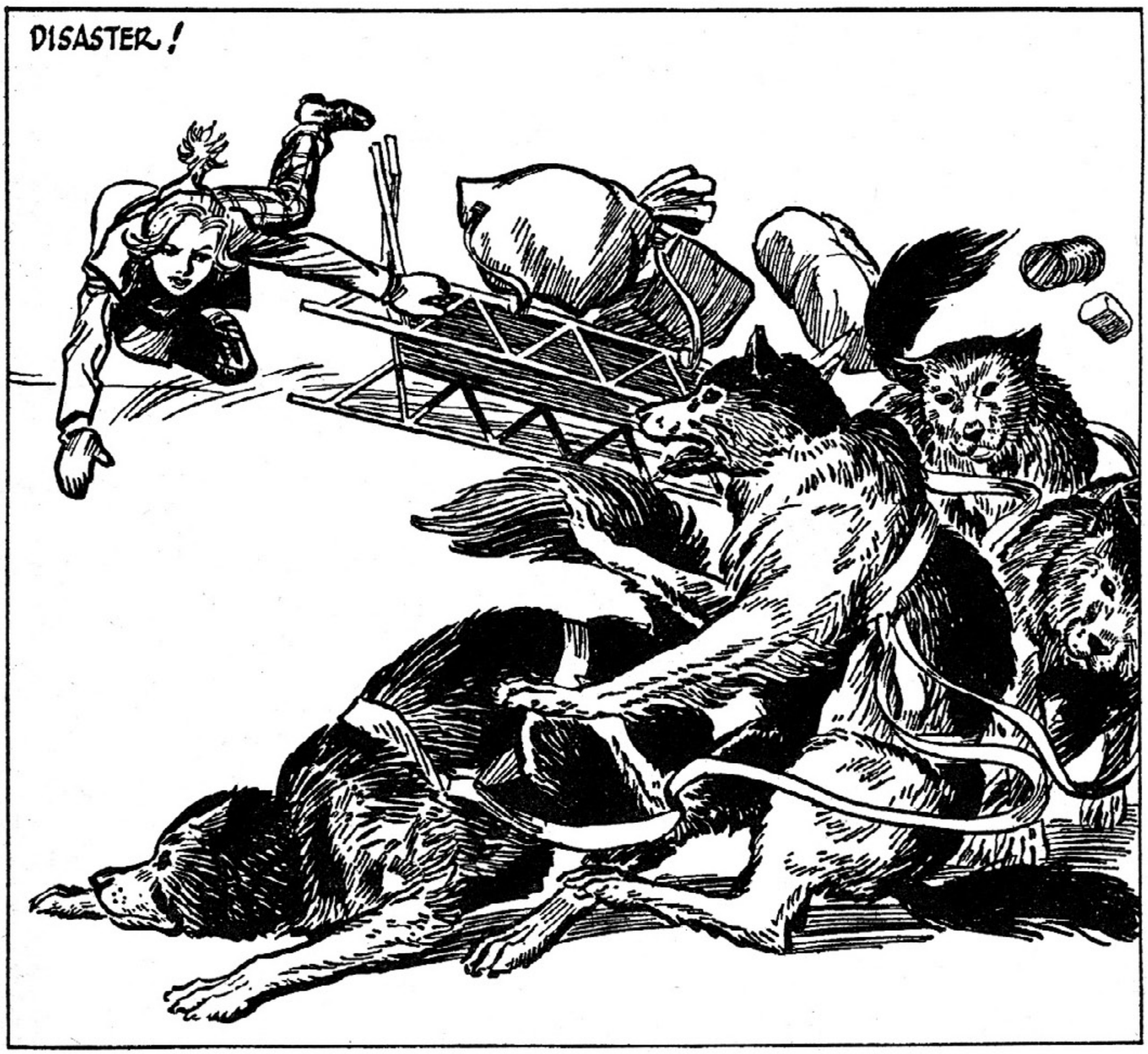
THE SERGEANT LISTENED QUIETLY WHILE NICK EXPLAINED. THEN...
I DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO SEND HER BACK WHERE SHE'S UNHAPPY, BUT I'VE GOT TO KNOW SHE'S BEING TAKEN GOOD CARE OF--SO I'LL MAKE A BARGAIN WITH YOU, STEWART. IF SHE PASSES THE TEST, SHE GOES NORTH WITH YOUR OUTFIT. IF SHE FAILS— WELL, I GUESS SHE'LL HAVE TO COME BACK WITH ME.

JILL WOULD NEVER FORGET THAT TEST. SHE AND SKIP SEEMED TO HAVE A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING AND THOUGH THE SLEIGH ALMOST OVERTURNED MORE THAN ONCE...
~~THEY FINISHED THE RUN WITH A BURST OF SPEED THAT BROUGHT A CHEER FROM THE ONLOOKERS.
THE JOB'S YOURS, JILL!
AND I'M GOING TO FORGET I EVER SAW YOU AFTER YOU LEFT PINE BLUFF.
OH, THAT'S WONDERFUL! THANK YOU BOTH!
A FEW MINUTES LATER...
WELL, DID YOU SPEAK TO STEWART? HAVE YOU GOT THE JOB OF SLED DRIVER?
LIKE HECK! A GAL'S GOT IT— THAT KID WHO SAW US TRY TO BEAT UP NICK STEWART! SHE'S TRAVELLIN' WITH THE OUTFIT, RUFE.

LATER THAT MORNING THE SNO-CAT TRAIN WAS ON ITS WAY NORTH TO THUNDER LAKE ~~ ITS LAST PORT OF CALL BEFORE LAUNCHING OUT ACROSS THE HUNDREDS OF MILES OF FROZEN WILDERNESS TO MOOSE CREEK.
THERE'S A TRADING POST BEYOND THAT RIDGE, JILL. CALL THERE AND PICK UP ANY MAIL OR GOODS THEY WANT TAKEN NORTH.
TARNATION! SHE'LL RECOGNISE YOU FOR SURE IF YOU TRY TO JOIN UP WITH 'EM. WE'VE GOT TO GET RID OF HER SOMEHOW, JAKE.
ALL RIGHT, NICK.
TOLD YOU SHE'D BE COMING HERE FOR THE MAIL, RUFE. I'LL GET DOWN THERE AN' FIND A WAY OF LOOSENING THE LOAD— UNDO THE STRAPS OR SOMETHIN'.
AS JILL SENT THE SLEIGH DOWN THE FAR SIDE OF THE RIDGE TOWARDS THE TRADING POST, TWO MEN STEPPED FROM THE TREES.
SHE'LL HAVE TO GO INSIDE TO SIGN FOR THE GOODS AFTER SHE'S GOT 'EM ABOARD— THAT'LL BE YOUR CHANCE. RECKON STEWART'LL CHANGE HIS MIND ABOUT KEEPING HER ON AFTER THIS!

WHEN JILL EVENTUALLY DROVE AWAY FROM THE TRADING POST WITH HER LOAD, SHE HAD NO SUSPICION THAT IT HAD BEEN TAMPERED WITH.
AWAY WE GO, SKIP!
SHE LAUGHED WITH EXHILARATION AS THE FROSTY AIR WHISTLED PAST. BUT, UNSEEN BY HER...
AS JILL APPEARED OVER THE RIDGE...
HERE SHE COMES! AN' SHE CAN SURE HANDLE THAT DOG TEAM.

THEN, SUDDENLY...
WHOA, SKIP! WHOA!

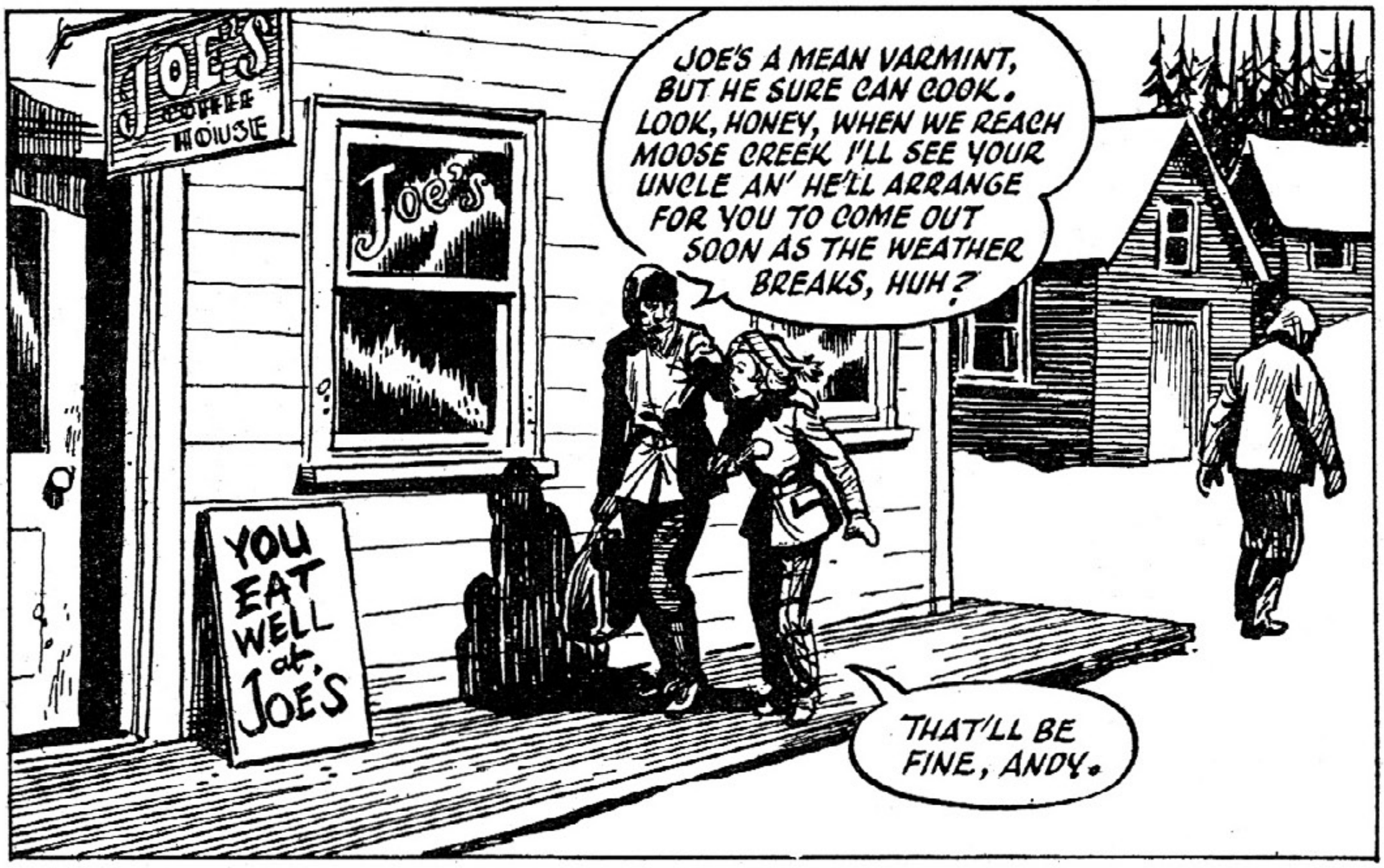

DISASTER!

THE LOAD SLIPPED ~~ RECKON THE STRAPS MUST HAVE BROKEN, NICK.
YOU ALL RIGHT, JILL?
YES, I~~I THINK SO. OH, I MUST SEE IF POOR SKIP'S HURT!

BUT WHEN NICK EXAMINED THE STRAPS,
SHE DIDN'T SECURE 'EM PROPERLY, ANDY. THAT ACCIDENT COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUS AND I BLAME MYSELF FOR GIVING HER THE JOB. SHE'S TOO YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED, AND I RECKON I'LL HAVE TO TELL HER SO.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, NICK. BETTER FOR HER TO STAY AT THUNDER LAKE AWHILE THAN RUN THE RISK OF MORE ACCIDENTS LIKE THIS ONE.

JILL NODDED WHEN NICK TOLD HER. SHE KNEW HE WAS THINKING ONLY OF HER SAFETY.
I~~I UNDERSTAND, NICK. THANKS FOR TRYING TO HELP ME, ANYWAY.
SURE GLAD NICK NEVER TOLD HER ABOUT THEM STRAPS~ BETTER IF SHE THINKS THEY BROKE.

WHEN THEY REACHED THE SETTLEMENT AT THUNDER LAKE THAT EVENING...
WHILE YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR A SLED DRIVER, NICK, I'LL TAKE JILL ALONG TO JOE MORGAN'S PLACE AN' GIVE HER A SLAP-UP FEED. THEN I'LL GET HER FIXED UP AT THE HOTEL.
THANKS, ANDY! TRY TO MAKE IT EASY FOR HER!


JOE'S
COFFEE HOUSE
Joe's
YOU EAT WELL at JOE'S
JOE'S A MEAN VARMINT, BUT HE SURE CAN COOK. LOOK, HONEY, WHEN WE REACH MOOSE CREEK I'LL SEE YOUR UNCLE AN' HE'LL ARRANGE FOR YOU TO COME OUT SOON AS THE WEATHER BREAKS, HUH?
THAT'LL BE FINE, ANDY.

IN THE EATING-HOUSE ANDY PUSHED SOME NOTES INTO JILL'S HAND.
NICK AN' ME, WE RECKON YOU'LL NEED SOME MONEY, SO YOU TAKE THIS.
ANDY, YOU'RE SWEET! I'LL PAY YOU BOTH BACK WHEN I JOIN UNCLE LARRY.

AS THEY CAME OUT...
OH, I'VE LEFT MY BAG - I'LL JUST SLIP BACK FOR IT!

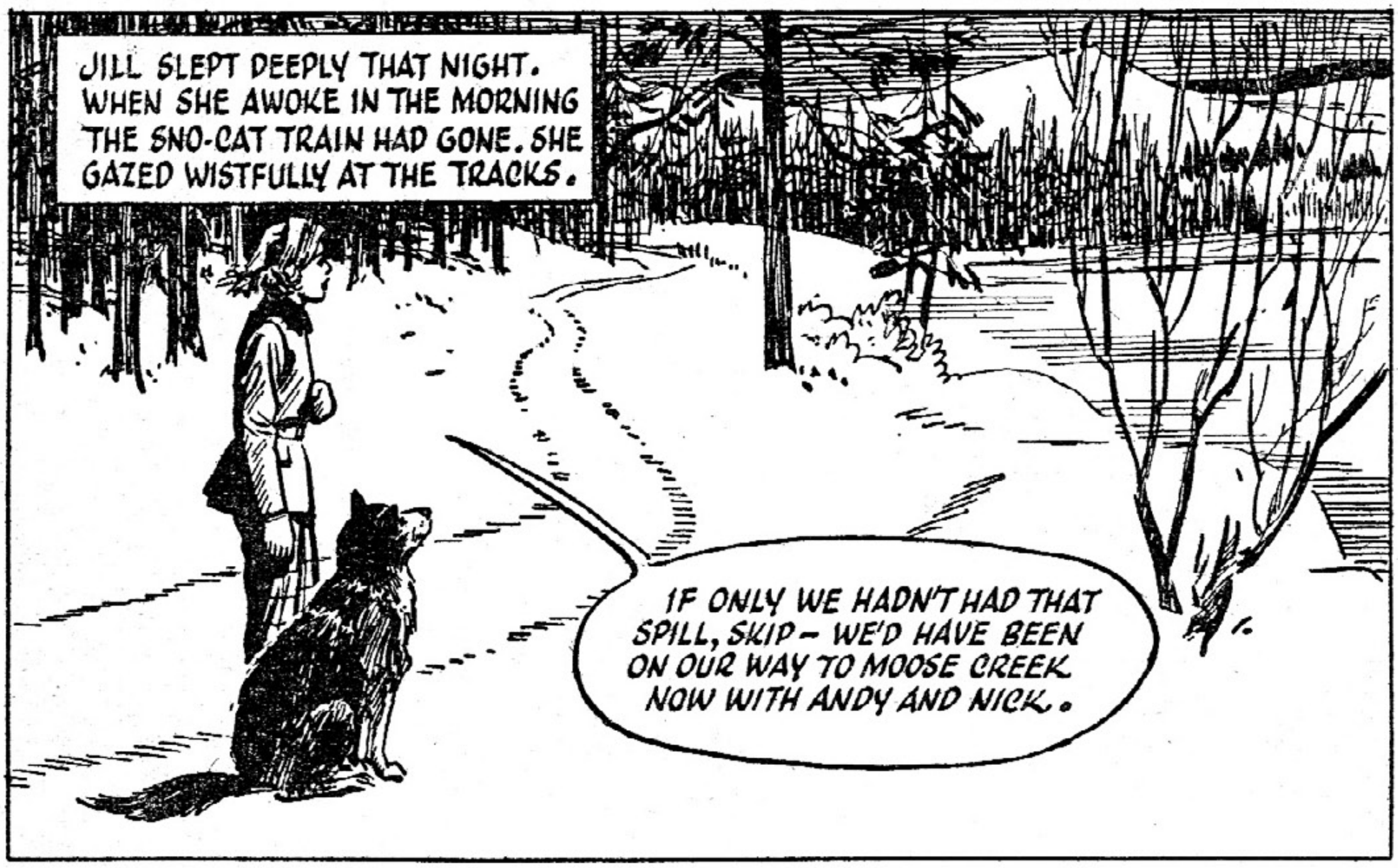
AS JILL WENT THROUGH THE DOORWAY, SHE WAS GREETED BY A TERRIFIC CRASH.
YOU CLUMSY, GOOD-FOR-NOTHIN' INJUN BRAT!

YOU'LL PAY FOR EVERY CENT OF THE DAMAGE OUTA YOUR WAGES, GIRL!
STOP BULLYING HER. IT WAS AN ACCIDENT! HERE, TAKE THIS TO COVER THE DAMAGE.

JOE MORGAN LOOKED AT JILL IN SURPRISE AS SHE THRUST INTO HIS PLUMP HAND SOME OF THE MONEY ANDY HAD JUST GIVEN HER. THEN...
RECKON IT'LL DO-- JUST ABOUT! GET BUSY AN' CLEAR UP THAT MESS, AMIK!

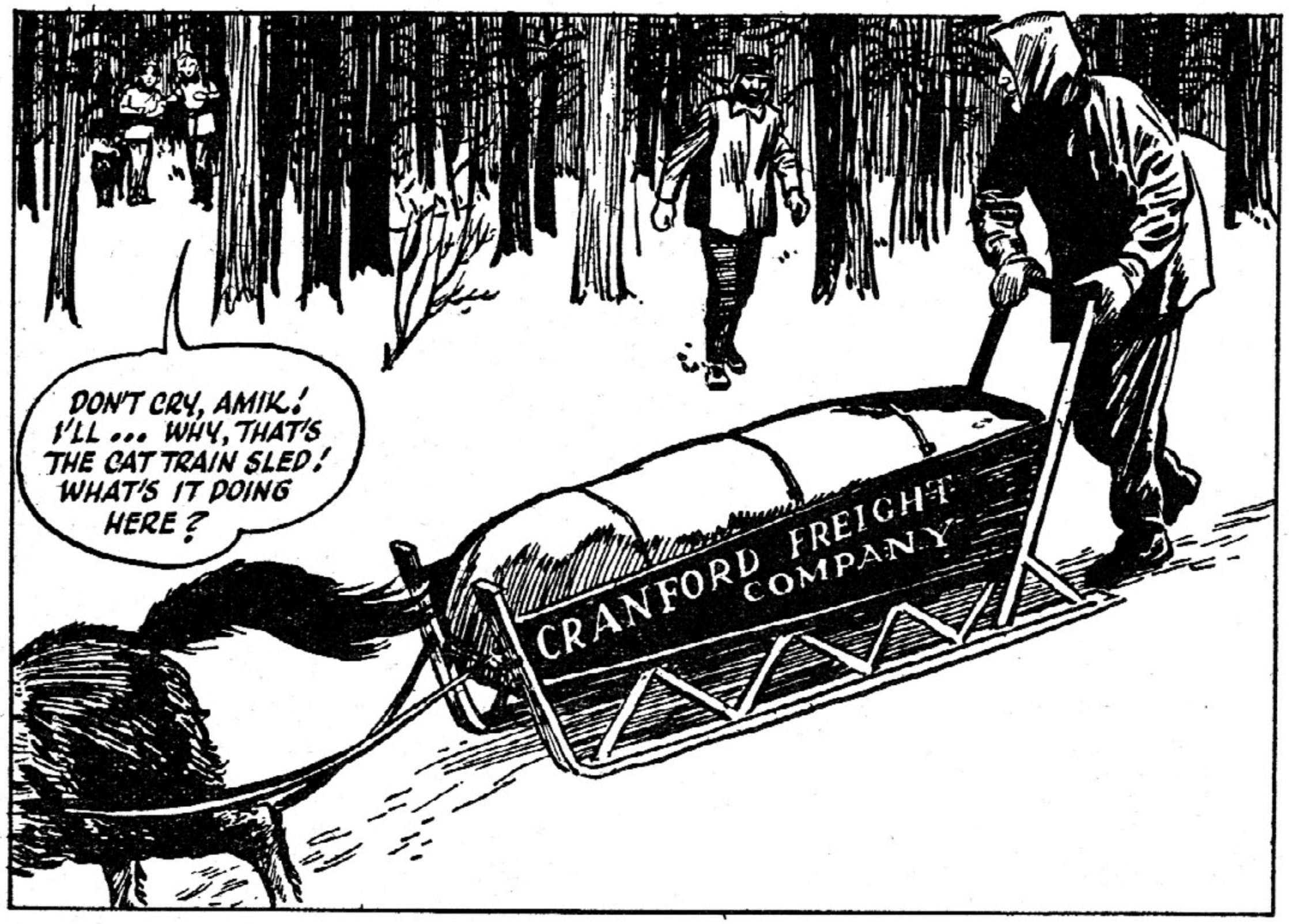
WHEN JILL REJOINED ANDY...
BEEN THINKIN' IT'LL BE PRETTY LONELY FOR YOU HERE BY YOURSELF, SO I'M GONNA LEAVE SKIP WITH YOU. RECKON YOU'D LIKE THAT, HUH?
OH, YES. THANK YOU, ANDY!

THEY PARTED ON THE HOTEL STEPS.
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.
GOODBYE, LASS. TAKE CARE OF HER, SKIP!


JILL SLEPT DEEPLY THAT NIGHT. WHEN SHE AWOKE IN THE MORNING THE SNO-CAT TRAIN HAD GONE. SHE GAZED WISTFULLY AT THE TRACKS.
IF ONLY WE HADN'T HAD THAT SPILL, SKIP – WE'D HAVE BEEN ON OUR WAY TO MOOSE CREEK NOW WITH ANDY AND NICK.

IF THEY LEFT AT MIDNIGHT, THEY MUST BE THIRTY MILES AWAY ALREADY. HELLO, WHO'S THAT?
THE YOUNG INDIAN GIRL TURNED A TEAR-STAINED FACE TO JILL.
ME UNHAPPY. MIS' MORGAN ANGRY WITH ME ALL TIME, WHITE GIRL.
WHY, IT'S AMIK! WHAT'S THE MATTER, AMIK?

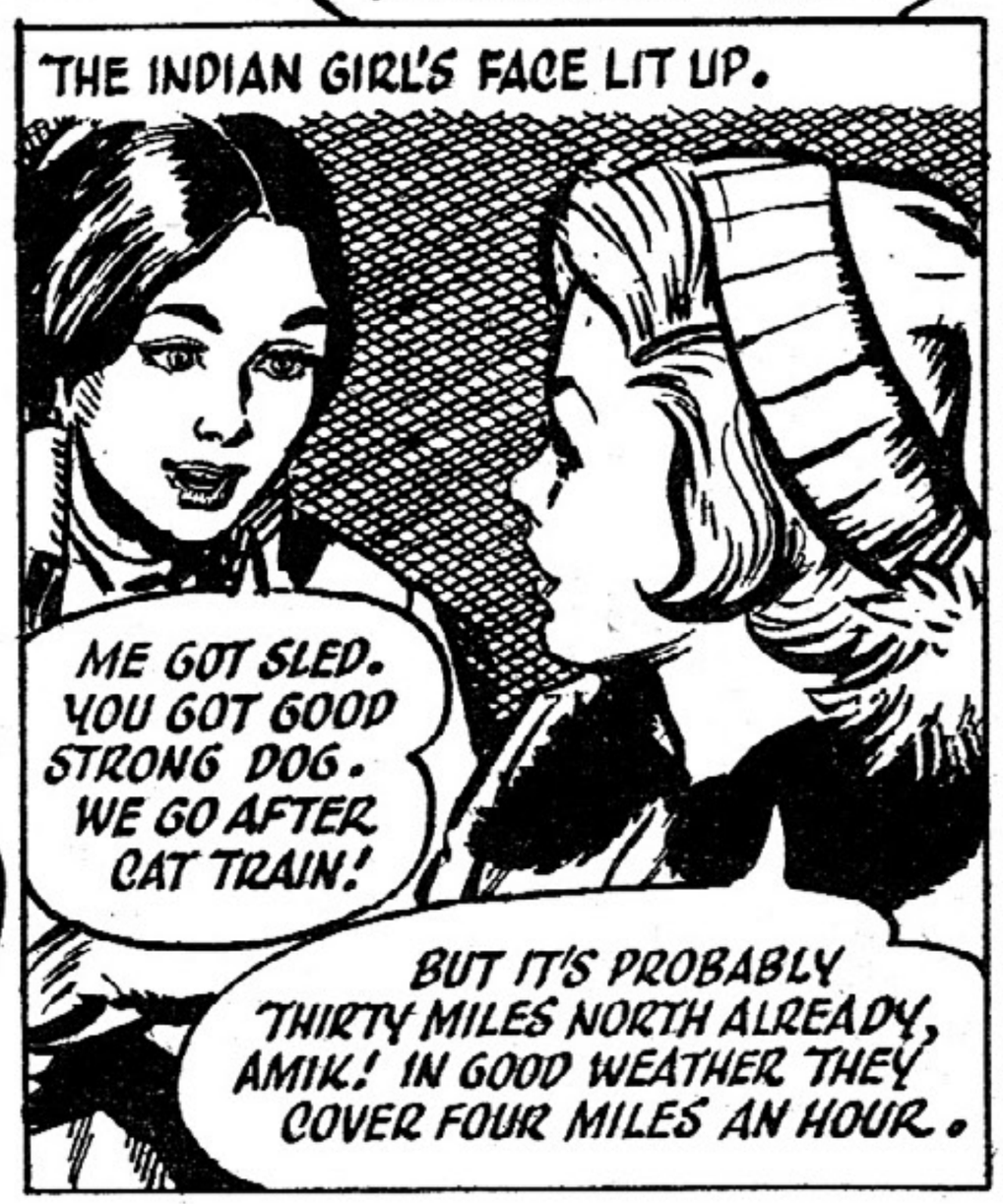
HE'S A HORRIBLE MAN! WHY DON'T YOU TELL YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER HOW UNKIND HE IS?
THEY DEAD MANY MOONS. ME ALL ALONE.


DON'T CRY, AMIK! I'LL ... WHY, THAT'S THE CAT TRAIN SLED! WHAT'S IT DOING HERE?
CRANFORD FREIGHT COMPANY

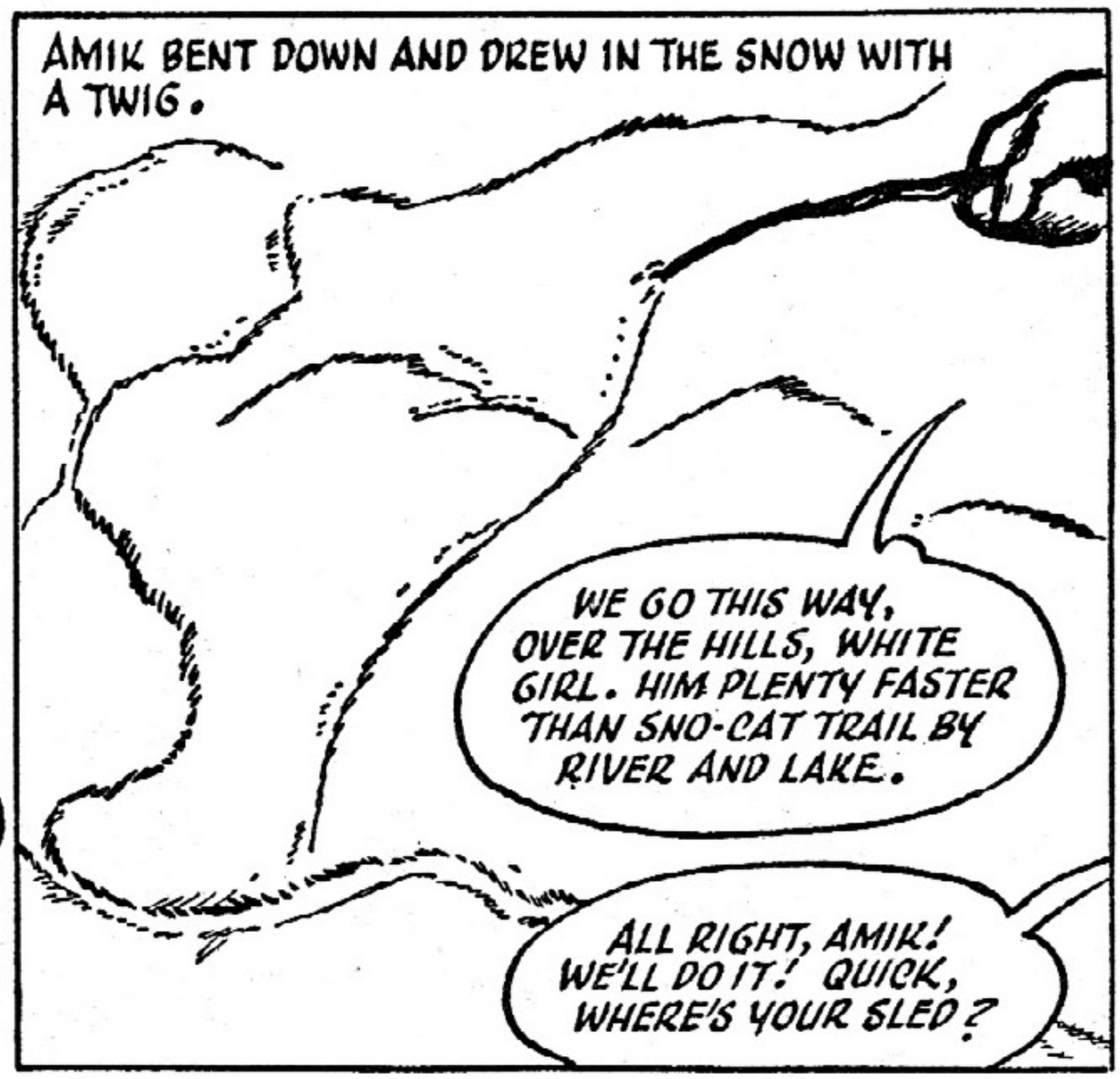
THIS IS GOIN' TO LOSE US TIME, YOU COMIN' BACK FOR THEM GOODS NICK STEWART FORGOT.
QUIT WORRYING, RUFE. I'LL CATCH UP WITH THE TRAIN BEFORE SUNDOWN BY CUTTING ACROSS COUNTRY. AS SOON AS I'VE FIXED 'EM GOOD, I'LL RADIO YOU.

AS THE SLED WENT SKIMMING AWAY OVER THE FROZEN LAKE, JILL RAN FORWARD ANGRILY.
I KNOW YOU! YOU'RE THE MAN WHO ATTACKED NICK STEWART IN PINE BLUFF! YOU AND THAT MAN ON THE SLED! YOU'RE SCHEMING SOMETHING AGAINST THE CAT TRAIN!
AREN'T YOU THE CLEVER LITTLE GIRL? WELL, THERE'S NOTHIN' YOU C'N DO ABOUT IT — AN' YOU'VE GOT NO PROOF.

AS RUFE STRODE AWAY, AMIK SIDLED UP TO JILL.
WHY YOU AND WHITE MAN QUARREL?
HE AND THAT MAN WITH THE SLED ARE PLOTTING SOMETHING AGAINST THE CATTRAIN. I HEARD THEM SAY AS MUCH! OH, IF ONLY THERE WAS SOME WAY I COULD GET A WARNING TO NICK STEWART!


THE INDIAN GIRL'S FACE LIT UP.
ME GOT SLED. YOU GOT GOOD STRONG DOG. WE GO AFTER CAT TRAIN!
BUT IT'S PROBABLY THIRTY MILES NORTH ALREADY, AMIK! IN GOOD WEATHER THEY COVER FOUR MILES AN HOUR.

WE GO ACROSS COUNTRY! ME KNOW INDIAN TRAILS. WE REACH CAT TRAIN BEFORE BAD MEN.


AMIK BENT DOWN AND DREW IN THE SNOW WITH A TWIG.
WE GO THIS WAY, OVER THE HILLS, WHITE GIRL. HIM PLENTY FASTER THAN SNO-CAT TRAIL BY RIVER AND LAKE.
ALL RIGHT, AMIK! WE'LL DO IT! QUICK, WHERE'S YOUR SLED?

AMIK LED THE WAY TO A SMALL HUT ON THE EDGE OF THE SETTLEMENT.
IT DOESN'T LOOK VERY SOLID, AMIK.
HIM PLENTY STRONG INDIAN HUNTING SLED. GO LIKE WIND THROUGH TREES WHERE BIG SLED HIM CRASH.

QUICKLY JILL HARNESSED SKIP TO THE SLED WHILE AMIK LOADED FOOD AND COOKING UTENSILS AND A SMALL AXE, AS WELL AS BLANKETS AND FURS.

IN NORTH COUNTRY MORE HASTE LESS SPEED, WHITE GIRL. WE MAKE SURE WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED FIRST. THEN NO DANGER.

JILL KNEW ALMOST AS SOON AS THEY STARTED OUT THAT AMIK HAD BEEN RIGHT ABOUT THE SLED. IT SHOT THROUGH NARROW PLACES THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANYTHING HEAVIER.

IT GOES LIKE A DREAM, AMIK. HOW DO THE INDIANS CURVE THE FRONT UP LIKE THAT?

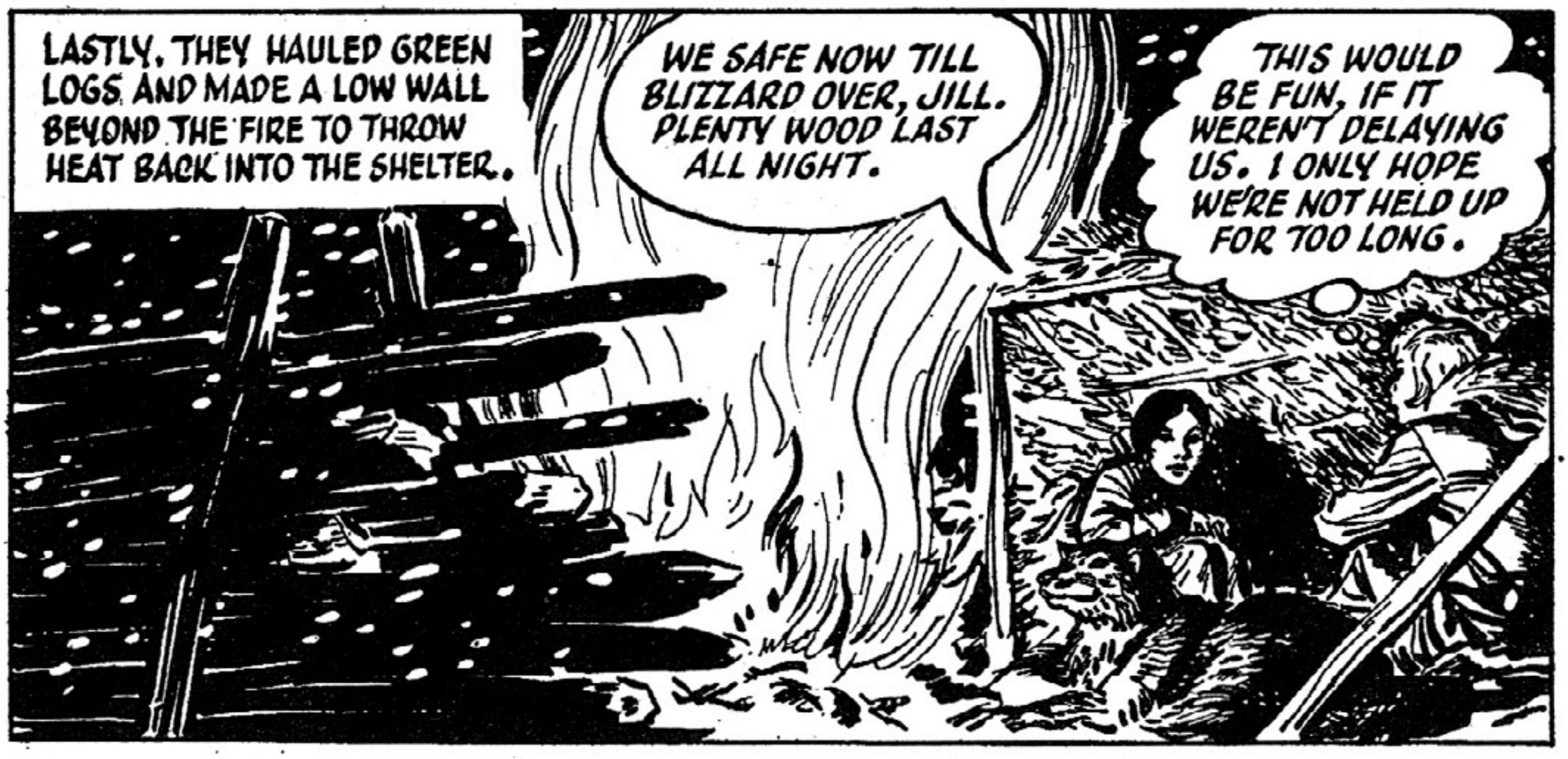
WOOD HIM STEAMED IN WET MOSS OVER SLOW FIRE, JILL.

LATE THAT AFTERNOON ...

ME THINK BLIZZARD COME! WE STOP, MAKE HEAP BIG FIRE AND SHELTER FROM SNOW. THEN WE ALL RIGHT.

I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT FIRE, AMIK!

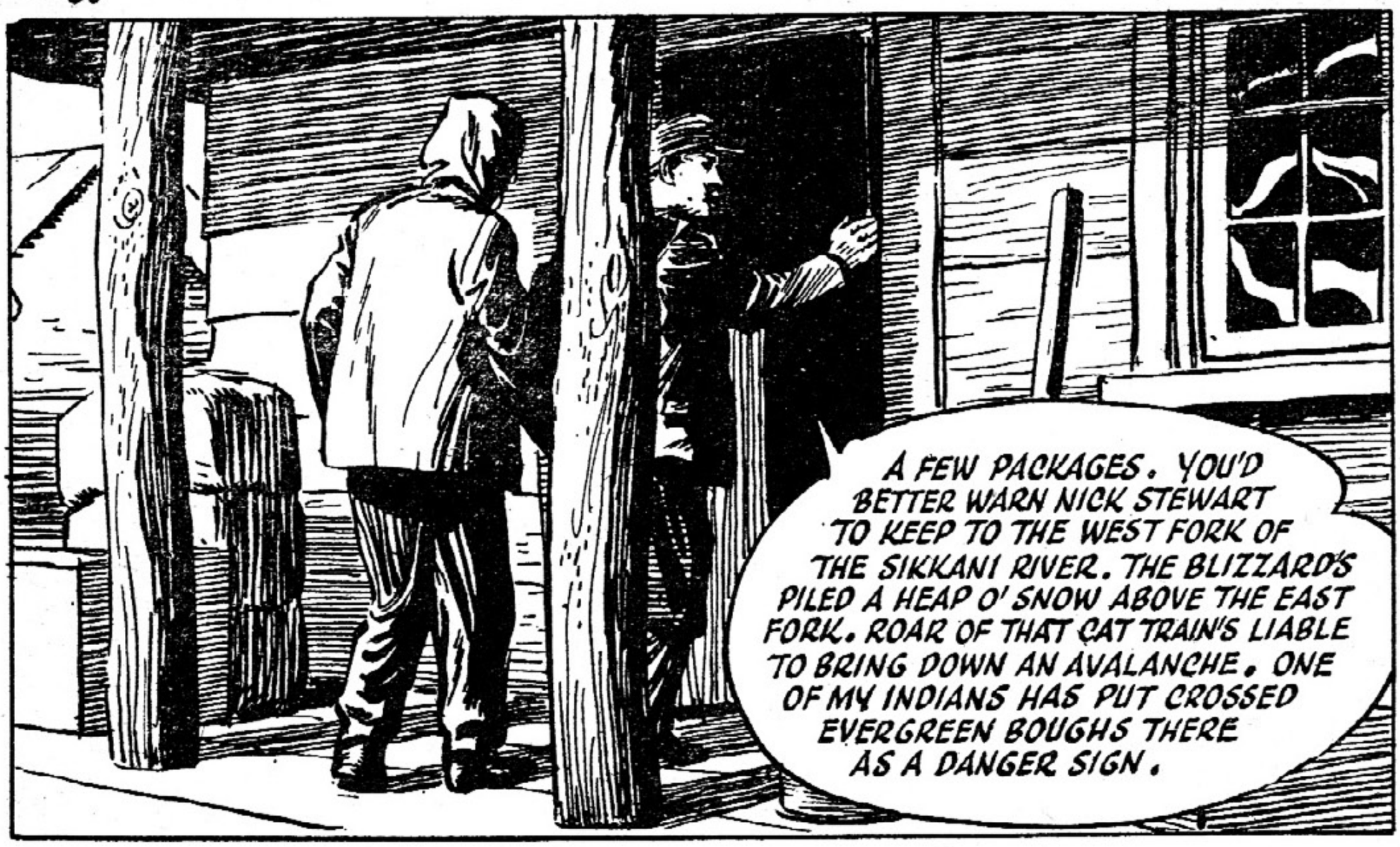
QUICKLY THEY GATHERED WOOD FOR THE FIRE AND SOON IT WAS BURNING MERRILY.
THE NEXT STEP WAS TO MAKE THE SHELTER. WITH HER AXE, AMIK CUT A NUMBER OF SLENDER BOUGHS TO MAKE THE FRAMEWORK.
THE SNOW WAS FALLING FAST NOW AND THE WIND SHRIEKED THROUGH THE FOREST AS THE GIRLS COVERED THE FRAME WITH BRUSHWOOD. MORE BRUSH WAS HEAPED INSIDE FOR BEDDING, WITH THE FURS ON TOP.


LASTLY, THEY HAULED GREEN LOGS AND MADE A LOW WALL BEYOND THE FIRE TO THROW HEAT BACK INTO THE SHELTER.
WE SAFE NOW TILL BLIZZARD OVER, JILL. PLENTY WOOD LAST ALL NIGHT.
THIS WOULD BE FUN, IF IT WEREN'T DELAYING US. I ONLY HOPE WE'RE NOT HELD UP FOR TOO LONG.

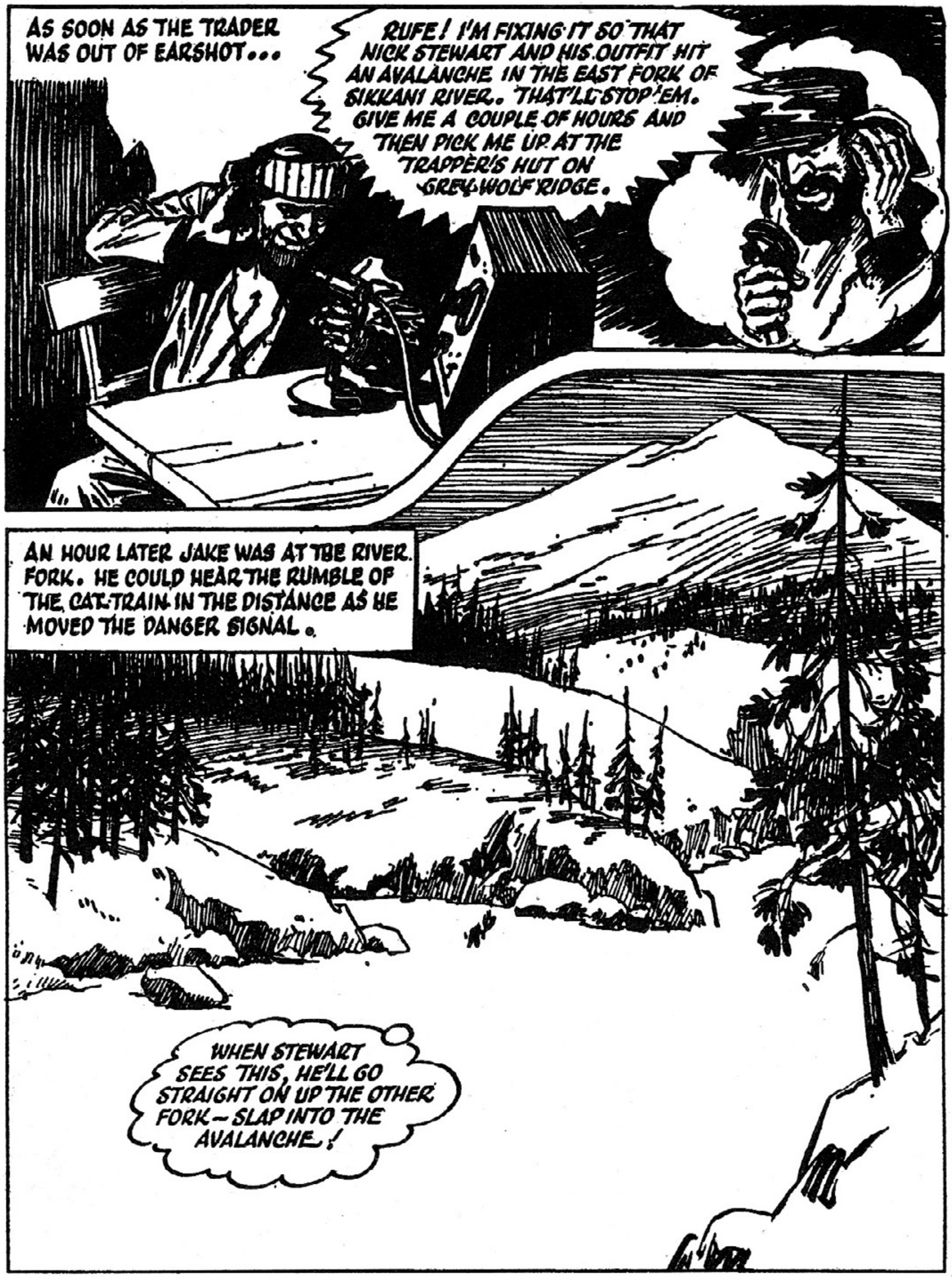
ALL NIGHT LONG THE BLIZZARD RAGED...
IT WAS ONLY WITH THE MORNING THAT THE SKIES CLEARED. AMIK AND JILL HAD A QUICK MEAL AND BROKE CAMP.
WE MUST HURRY, AMIK! I'VE GOT TO WARN NICK STEWART AGAINST THOSE TWO MEN!
WE HEAD FOR RIVER NOW.

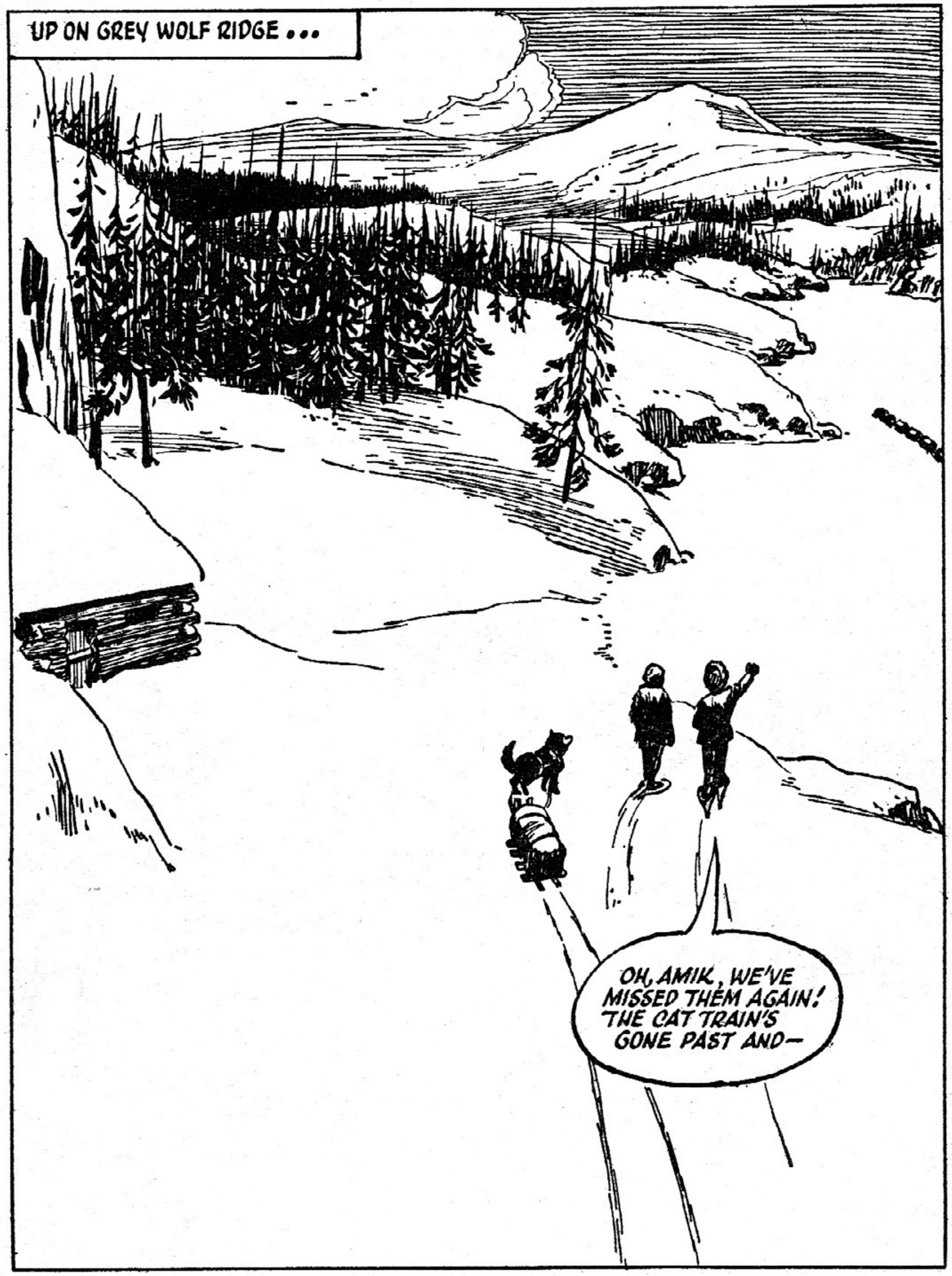
BUT WHEN THEY REACHED THE POINT WHERE AMIK HAD HOPED TO INTERCEPT THE CAT TRAIN...
TOO LATE! IT'S ALREADY GONE.
WE HURRY ON TO GREY WOLF RIDGE! CATCH 'UM THERE.

EAGERLY THEY PUSHED ON IN THE DIRECTION OF THE RIDGE, WHILE AT A TRADING POST SOME MILES NORTH...
CRA. FREIGHT CO
HOWDY, MISTER! YOU'RE NEW WITH NICK STEWART'S OUTFIT, AREN'T YOU?
YEAH! BILL LOGAN BROKE HIS LEG. GOT ANYTHING FOR MOOSE CREEK?
FREIGHT COMPANY


A FEW PACKAGES. YOU'D BETTER WARN NICK STEWART TO KEEP TO THE WEST FORK OF THE SIKKANI RIVER. THE BLIZZARD'S PILED A HEAP O' SNOW ABOVE THE EAST FORK. ROAR OF THAT CAT TRAIN'S LIABLE TO BRING DOWN AN AVALANCHE. ONE OF MY INDIANS HAS PUT CROSSED EVERGREEN BOUGHS THERE AS A DANGER SIGN.

JAKE'S EYES GLEAMED.
THANKS, MISTER! ER--MIND IF I USE YOUR RADIO?
GO AHEAD!

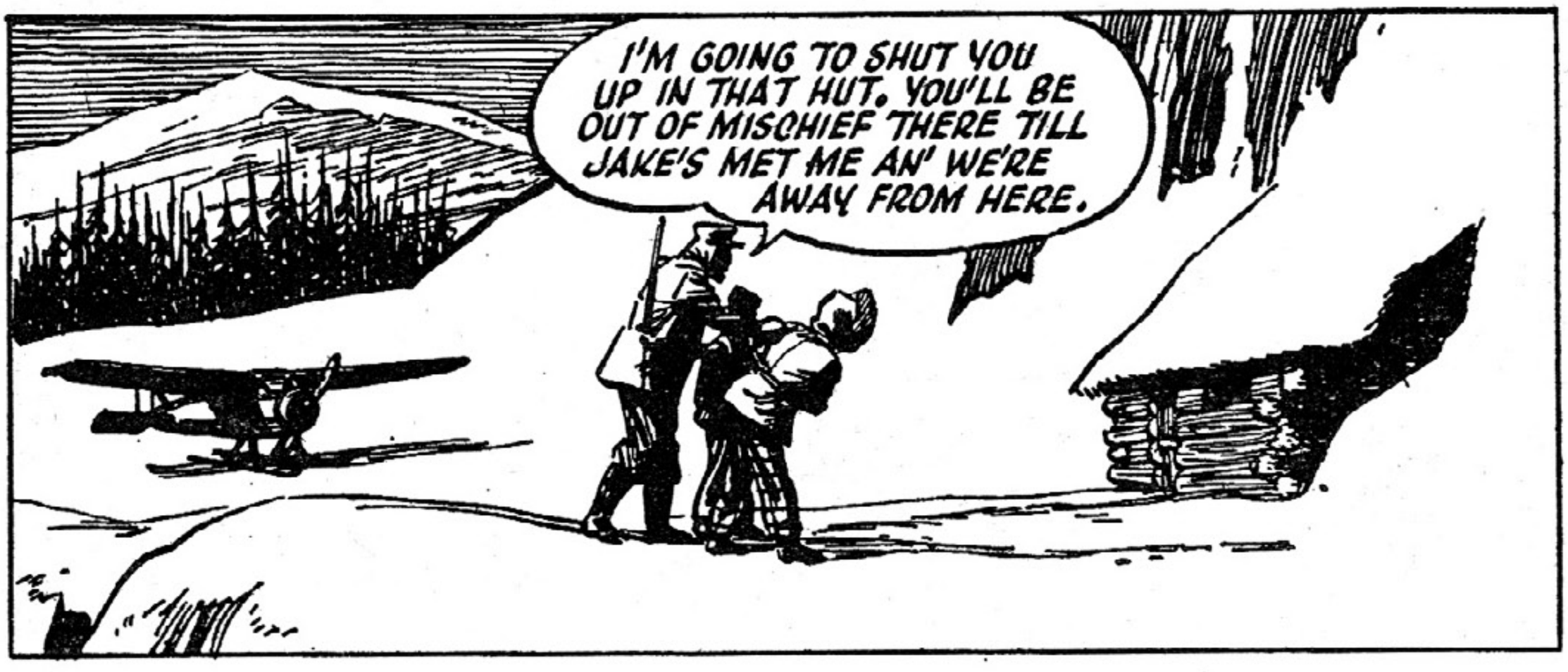

AS SOON AS THE TRADER WAS OUT OF EARSHOT...
RUFE! I'M FIXING IT SO THAT NICK STEWART AND HIS OUTFIT HIT AN AVALANCHE IN THE EAST FORK OF SIKKANI RIVER. THAT'LL STOP 'EM. GIVE ME A COUPLE OF HOURS AND THEN PICK ME UP AT THE TRAPPER'S HUT ON GREY WOLF RIDGE.
AN HOUR LATER JAKE WAS AT THE RIVER FORK. HE COULD HEAR THE RUMBLE OF THE CAT-TRAIN IN THE DISTANCE AS HE MOVED THE DANGER SIGNAL.
WHEN STEWART SEES THIS, HE'LL GO STRAIGHT ON UP THE OTHER FORK — SLAP INTO THE AVALANCHE!


UP ON GREY WOLF RIDGE ...
OH, AMIK, WE'VE MISSED THEM AGAIN! THE CAT TRAIN'S GONE PAST AND—

JILL BROKE OFF AS SHE HEARD THE ROAR OF AN ENGINE.
LOOK, JILL! BUSH PLANE!
WE CAN GET THE PILOT TO RADIO NICK A WARNING!
EAGERLY THE GIRLS RAN TOWARDS THE 'PLANE AS IT TAXIED TO A STANDSTILL -- BUT JILL GAVE A GASP OF DISMAY AS SHE SAW WHO THE PILOT WAS!
OH! IT'S ONE OF THE MEN PLOTTING AGAINST NICK! RUN, AMIK!

BUT RUFE SCOBIE WAS TOO QUICK FOR THEM.
SO YOU'VE COME AFTER STEWART TO WARN HIM, EH?
LET HER GO!
WITH A SNARL, SKIP LEAPT TO THE GIRLS' DEFENCE...

...BUT A BLOW FROM THE BUTT OF RUFE'S GUN SENT HIM REELING BACK OVER THE RIDGE!
SKIP!
THAT'S SETTLED HIS HASH!


I'M GOING TO SHUT YOU UP IN THAT HUT. YOU'LL BE OUT OF MISCHIEF THERE TILL JAKE'S MET ME AN' WE'RE AWAY FROM HERE.

ANOTHER TEN MINUTES OR SO AND STEWART WILL BE FINISHED! MY PAL JAKE'S CHANGED THE DANGER SIGNAL AT THE RIVER FORK – SO STEWART WILL TAKE THE EAST FORK! AND THAT'LL BE THE END OF HIS OUTFIT!

RUFE OPENED THE DOOR OF THE HUT – AND THEN IT HAPPENED!
AAARGH!
SKIP – OH, SKIP! YOU'RE SAFE AFTER ALL – THE TRACES BROKE!

RUFE SPRAWLED HEADLONG INTO THE HUT.
QUICK, AMIK! THE BAR!

COME ON! WE'VE JUST GOT TO STOP THE CAT TRAIN BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

SEE! WE NEVER GET THERE IN TIME, JILL!
THERE'S STILL A CHANCE SKIP CAN SAVE THEM!
ON THE CAT TRAIN, VERY SOON AFTER, ANDY GLANCED FROM THE COOK SHACK.
WELL, BLOW ME DOWN! IT'S OLD SKIP!

DANGER SIGNAL ON WEST FORK! WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE THE OTHER ONE.
WHAT THE DICKENS ARE YOU DOIN' HERE, OLD FELLER? WHERE'S JILL? HEY, WHAT'S THIS UNDER YOUR COLLAR!
EVEN AS ANDY READ THE NOTE, THE CAT TRAIN SWUNG TOWARDS THE EAST FORK.
DON'T TAKE THE EAST FORK GREAT DANGER. JILL
JEHOSEPHAT!

VICK! NICK! STOP THE TRAIN, FOR PETE'S SAKE!
WHEN NICK READ JILL'S MESSAGE...
THE DANGER SIGNAL OF THE CROSSED BOUGHS WAS AT THE WEST FORK, NOT THIS ONE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT JILL'S GOT ON TO, BUT ... WELL, I GUESS WE'D BETTER GO FORWARD ON FOOT AND TAKE A LOOK.
SLOWLY SOME OF THE CREW WALKED FORWARD, THEIR SPIKED BOOTS CRUNCHING ON THE ICE. THEN, SUDDENLY, AS THEY ROUNDED A BEND...
AVALANCHE!
RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!

WITH A ROAR LIKE THUNDER, COUNTLESS TONS OF SNOW AND ICE CRASHED DOWN ON THE FROZEN RIVER. AND AS THE MEN STARED, SILENT AND SHAKEN, JILL AND AMIK CAME PANTING UP.
OH, NICK! THANK GOODNESS SKIP GOT TO YOU IN TIME!
PHEW, YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN, JILL! BUT WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? HOW DID YOU KNOW THIS FORK WAS DANGEROUS?

BREATHLESSLY JILL TOLD THEM THE WHOLE STORY.
WE OWE OUR LIVES TO YOU TWO GIRLS.
I'D LIKE TO GET MY HANDS ON THOSE SKUNKS!
THERE'S ONE OF THEM! THAT'S JAKE UP THERE, MAKING A BOLT FOR IT!

AFTER HIM, FELLERS!
NO! LET HIM GO, BOYS! WE'LL LEAVE THE MOUNTIES TO PICK HIM UP – AND HIS ACCOMPLICE FROM THE HUT ON GREY WOLF RIDGE.
A FEW DAYS LATER IN MOOSE CREEK AN ENTHUSIASTIC CROWD TURNED OUT TO WELCOME THE CAT TRAIN– AND AMONG THEM WAS MR. CRANFORD, THE MANAGER OF NICK'S COMPANY, WHO HAD FLOWN UP.
BY GLORY, NICK, YOU MADE IT! AND WITH A DAY TO SPARE, TOO! THIS CALLS FOR A CELEBRATION!

WHEN THE TRAIN STOPPED IN THE CENTRE OF THE TOWN...
UNCLE LARRY! UNCLE LARRY!
JILL! HONEY, IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU... BUT HOW COME YOU'RE WITH THE CAT TRAIN?

BITING HER LIP, AMIK TURNED SADLY AWAY AS JILL AND HER UNCLE TALKED TOGETHER. BUT THEN...
HEY, AMIK! WHERE D'YOU FIGURE YOU'RE RUNNING OFF TO? YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE WITH US! JILL WANTS IT, AND SO DO I!
FOR ALWAYS? AMIK WILL BE JILL'S SISTER? OH, THANK YOU, MR. LARRY! THANK YOU!

NOW PLEASE TURN OVER FOR PATTI'S PAGE

A LETTER FROM PATTI, the youngest girl in the office

Hello, girls !

Do you like music ? Mum and Dad gave me a record player my last year at school and I've been collecting discs ever since.

I'm a bit of a square, you know ! I like some pop songs and I adore traditional jazz and folk songs, but my favourite kind of music really is classical. When we're having dinner on Sunday, Dad always says " Put on *The King and I*, Patti " and I say " Oh, no, Dad, not *again* ! What about some nice opera ? " We end up by playing something we all enjoy, like Nina and Frederik or Harry Belafonte !

I usually find myself listening to my classical records alone. And it's probably just as well, because I really let myself go sometimes. Well, don't *you* want to get up and stamp up and down the room when you hear a gorgeously noisy march ? Or shut your eyes and just drown in the sweeping climax of a dramatic opera ?

Once my young brother Stevie came in and found me " conducting ", using a big spoon as a baton ! He laughed like an idiot—until I pointed out that it was no crazier than him putting a tin bowl on his head and pretending to be an astronaut !

Well, it's time for me to say goodbye again. But first I want to wish you all a very happy New Year from everybody in the office.

Your friend,

SCHOOLGIRLS PICTURE LIBRARY,
FLEETWAY HOUSE,
FARRINGDON STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4.

Patti

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